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A
COMMON-SENSE
HELL

Being the Practical Thoughts
of a Business Man About the
Future Fate of the Wicked,
Contained in Letters to his Son.

By
ARTHUR RICHARD ROSE



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NET

A COMMON-SENSE HELL

DEDICATED
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To
THEODORE ROOSEVELT,
The Man

Because His Skill and Joy in
Stripping off the Husk,
While Preserving the Kernel
Of anything whose Kernel is Worth Preserving
And whose Husk Obscures that Worth,
Have been a Constant Inspiration
To the Author
In the Preparation of
This Work

FOREWORD

THE appeal which this book makes, is to those who earnestly desire to retain the Bible as the basis of their faith, and yet are perturbed and distressed by certain seeming contradictions in its teachings.

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Letter No. I

CHOOSING HIS LIFE WORK

*Princeton University, Jan. 15, '05.
Princeton, N. J.*

My dear Father :

As you know, I will soon be graduated here and receive the degree of Bachelor of Arts from my Alma Mater. It is high time, therefore, that I should decide what my life-work is to be, in order that I may lose no time after graduation in entering upon it.

Several times during the Christmas vacation I intimated to you that my preference would be to become a minister of the gospel. Have you any objection to my entering the theological seminary here next term and fitting myself for the high office of a preacher of God's word ?

I know you have none on the ground of expense, for you have always contemplated putting me into a profession or business after the completion of my Arts course; but in some way I feel, rather than know, that your selection for me would *not* be the Church.

I have hesitated to bring this question to an issue between us, father, because if we differ seriously on this subject, it will be the first time we ever have differed about anything important. I shall always desire to pay that respect to your wishes which my filial gratitude to so splendid a father as you have been to me, calls for; but yet I am a man now (though a young one) and I ought to be left to make for myself a choice that will have consequences of far more importance to me than they can possibly be to you.

Please write me fully your views on this subject.

My heart is set upon the ministry. The most earnest wish I have in the world is to become a preacher of God's Word. The most

earnest wish I have in the world next to that, is not to grieve or disappoint you. How is it to be, father?

Your loving son,

ARTHUR.

Letter No. II

A WANING PROFESSION

*Drexel Building, Wall Street,
New York, Jan. 20.*

My dear Son :

Your letter of Jan. 15 impresses me favorably on account of its frankness and earnestness. It certainly is time that we faced the situation involved in choosing a profession for you and it certainly is true that after we have argued it out you should finally be left to choose for yourself.

As for your strong preference to become a preacher, all I will say now is: Why choose a profession whose power and influence are on the wane?

There was a time when the pulpit was a mighty factor in this land, when the preacher's word came pretty near being law in his

little community. That day is past. The preaching of the gospel of Christ from the pulpits of America to-day has much less influence over the average business man than it had even a generation ago. The average business man does not go to church in this age. Church members nowadays are mostly women.

Do you aspire to be a leader of women, or do you aspire to be a leader of men ?

Answer me that, my son, before we go any further.

Your affectionate father,

J. G. R.

Letter No. III

DECLINE OF CHURCH-GOING

Princeton University, Jan. 25.

My dear Father :

Your somewhat blunt question demanding to know whether I aspire to be a leader of men or a leader of women, can only be directly answered by my replying that of course I aspire to be a leader of men.

When I first read this question from your pen I was strongly inclined to dispute your assertion that the preacher of the gospel of Christ is not as much a leader of men to-day as he ever was. Yet when I called to mind all the complaints I had heard from the pulpit and from the religious press, that business men are staying away from the church more and more ; and when I reflected that the clergymen who apparently have the most in-

fluence upon the thought of our time are those who compose the faculties of our universities and colleges or fill editorial chairs, or make a specialty of sociological or philanthropic work, or preach politics rather than the Bible, I began to realize that the preacher of the simple gospel of Christ *has* lost much of that hold which he once had upon the life of the people.

Certainly if the numbers of American business men who do not go to church continue to increase in the future in the same proportion as those numbers have been increasing in recent years, no one will be able to deny that the profession of preaching the gospel is a waning one.

But on the other hand, father, I cannot believe that this apparently growing habit of the average American business man to stay away from church, is to become a permanent national characteristic. I cannot believe that the proportion of non-church-goers is to increase indefinitely. I do believe that the pres-

ent decadence of church attendance is only a passing symptom due to temporary and removable causes. I do believe firmly that the preacher of the simple gospel of Christ will again be as powerful a factor in his community as he was in the past. Just *why* I believe this I cannot explain ; but I feel sure of it.

Now what do you, a shrewd business man, think is the cause of the present decline of the influence of the preacher over the business men of America? Let me have your views on this, Father. They may throw some light upon my perplexity about the present, or afford some reason for my optimism about the future.

Your loving son,

ARTHUR.

Letter No. IV

THE ILLOGICALITY OF THEOLOGIAN'S AND THE DOGMA OF INSPIRATION

*Drexel Building, Wall Street,
New York, Feb. 1.*

My dear Arthur :

Whether your optimism with regard to the future influence of the preacher in America is well or ill-founded, I will not attempt to decide. It will be no trouble, however, to give you my views as to the causes which have led to the present decadence of that influence from what it was in former years.

Your query : " What is the cause ? " is not new. Many before you have asked it, and many answers have been given to it. Only one of these answers satisfies me. It is that the plan of salvation, preached from the pulpit, is too *illogical* to satisfy the intellect of

the average American business man of *to-day* as it did satisfy the less logical or exacting minds of his forefathers.

Too illogical—that's the point, my son, too self-contradictory.

The average American business man of to-day knows much more of the world as it actually is, than his forefathers did. Knowledge of things that really are so, is vastly more general to-day than it was even two generations ago. Nearly every decade of the last sixty years has witnessed the abandonment of some belief—religious, historic or scientific—that was as firmly held by our forefathers as the dogma of inspiration is held by many churchmen to-day. Well-meaning Christian men have tortured and killed one another in the not remote past for the sake of religious tenets that are no longer considered to be of vital importance. Countless Christian mothers have wept bitter tears, believing that their children who died in infancy were eternally damned, according to a creed now pretty generally ab-

rogated to the museum of metaphysical curios. Other dogmas, now firmly believed, will meet the same fate in time. We need not enumerate them all here. But, just as an example, let us consider this doctrine of plenary inspiration of the New Testament, which would have us believe that the gospels are faultless and that the gospel writers were supernaturally preserved from all error in setting down the words of Christ and in expressing His true meaning.

Did you ever, when seeking for the real meaning of Christ's words, as reported by the Apostles, attach much significance to the fact that these reports were written years after Christ had died?

Before I went into banking, I was a newspaper reporter, as you know, and the paper I worked for, laid particular stress upon the accuracy of its reports. I was not a short-hand writer, but I had an excellent memory and could with great rapidity make copious notes, from which I afterwards wrote out my reports.

My specialty was interviews with prominent men, and in order to be accurate, I frequently submitted my finished article to the man interviewed, after I had written the interview out in full, but before it was published. Although oftentimes hardly an hour had elapsed between the time I interviewed him and the time when I began, with the aid of my excellent memory and my copious notes, to set down his words in full on paper, I many times failed, in spite of extreme care, to get them down just exactly as they were uttered, and I often found, on submitting the proof to him for revision, that I had in some sentences unintentionally varied not only his language but his meaning.

Now consider carefully the fact that the Apostles were not short-hand writers, and let me ask you what are the reasonable and common-sense chances, that years after Christ was dead, they could write out reports of what He said throughout His entire ministry, without making many errors in His exact lan-

guage and also failing in other cases to convey His exact meaning?

Do not these considerations afford a common-sense business man good reason for refusing to receive as absolutely accurate and beyond the peradventure of mistake, those reports of Christ's sayings which seem self-contradictory or at variance with the real facts of life which one sees all about him?

I say they do. And I predict that this doctrine of infallibility of the Gospel writers will be among the very next which will be discarded by Protestants everywhere.

Now, the educated, practical, American business man, reading, remembering, and reflecting on these things, observes that these changes which have occurred in the religious belief of Christians appear to have arisen, not through any new revelation, but by the simple though slow process of applying more or less *common-sense* to the interpretation of the true *meaning* of the Scriptures. He is aware that there are other tenets of his church

to which this touchstone of common-sense does not yet seem to have been applied. He says to himself:

“What is the use of my taking this or that part of a creed too seriously? In another generation it may be so modified as to be practically eliminated.”

Especially is he inclined to apply this line of reasoning to any tenet of faith which seems to him to be markedly illogical and contradictory of the simple teachings of Christ.

“The more illogical it is,” he says to himself, “the sooner will it be banished to the limbo of outworn superstitions and therefore the less is it worth worrying myself about.”

Now, some of the most illogical of all the tenets of the Christian faith are enunciated constantly from the pulpit to-day and the practical, American business man is called upon to believe them by the exercise of *faith*. If he has not faith enough to accept these illogical tenets as the very truth, he is abjured to pray for more faith and to keep on praying

for more and more faith until he gets enough faith to enable him to accept as true these dogmas which his reason, unaided by faith, rejects.

But the practical American business man has learned by experience, observation and reading that almost any one may persuade himself to believe anything, if he only desires hard enough to bring that state of mind about. In religion as well as in politics he has seen men under the stimulus of a revival, or an especially magnetic exhorter or a trained pleader, or in a free silver campaign, let us say, mentally lash themselves into thoroughly believing theories which they did not at all understand and were wholly unable to argue intelligently about—theories which, in spite of their firm faith, the developments of a few years proved to them conclusively to be utterly false.

Therefore the practical American business man is coming more and more to think: "If such and such a theory does not commend

itself to my cool judgment as agreeing with the teachings of Christ Himself, there is little to be gained by seeking *faith* in order to believe it—for believing a thing by faith only, cannot make that thing really so, and it is a sound business principle that to labor at anything under a misapprehension as to the inside facts, is seldom profitable and often positively injurious.”

Now I, myself, Arthur, fairly represent the average, practical, American business man and I know exactly what cooled *my* desire to attend Church (for I was a faithful attendant when I was your age) and what at last quenched that desire altogether. And I have taken the trouble to ascertain by personal inquiry from hundreds of other American business men what is the cause of *their* distaste for hearing the “preachèd word” as it is sometimes called, and I have come to the conclusion that it is this (I use an epitome of the experience of all of them): “It irritates me to hear a preacher insist that I should

regulate my life according to doctrines or creeds which I do not believe to be founded logically, reasonably and convincingly upon the teachings of Christ and which he is unable to demonstrate to me to *be* founded logically, reasonably and convincingly upon the teachings of Christ. From my pew I cannot answer him and refute the illogical arguments he advances while endeavoring to uphold his creed and therefore, after enduring this weekly irritation as long as I could, I have given up listening to sermons and now I go to church only under pressure and as seldom as possible. It is useless to abjure me to believe this or that tenet if it is so illogical as to insult my reasoning powers; because no reading, thinking, common-sense man in these days can fail to be aware that the most learned and the most sanctified members of the Christian clergy still differ widely and radically among themselves as to the proper interpretation and the true meaning of many highly important passages of the Scriptures and even the most

generally accepted of the Christian doctrines are constantly being assailed from the pulpit by the newer and more learned generation of clergymen. By the time this new generation of clergymen has become old, there will be still newer clergymen to assail the doctrines which the new clergymen of to-day consider unassailable. This has been so in the past and history repeats herself. I have not time, crowded as I am with the affairs of my hustling business life, to make a personal study of the original sources from which our Bible is derived ; therefore I will let those who have the time to do it, continue to argue among themselves about its real meaning until they have arrived at some unanimous conclusion. In the meantime, I will believe just so much of their dogma as is approved by what common-sense my Creator has given me and I will not allow my soul to be harrowed up too much by such of their tenets as seem to me to be wholly illogical and entirely unreasonable."

This, I say, my dear Arthur, is a faithful

description of the feeling which cooled my desire to listen to the average sermon and this, I say, describes the feeling of very many other practical business men who do not attend church except on rare occasions.

Hoping my long letter has not wearied you and that it may throw some light on your perplexity, I remain,

Your affectionate father,

J. G. R.

Letter No. V

A CHALLENGE TO DEBATE

Princeton University, Feb. 5.

My dear Father :

Far from wearying me, your long letter of Feb. 1 interested me keenly, from start to finish. I had no idea that you had given so much thought to theology, because ever since I grew old enough to notice, you have not been a church-going man and to me have always seemed absorbed in business.

That is why I never talked with you about theology ; but now that I know why you showed no interest in church services—now since I realize that your neglect of them was not due to indifference towards religion, another bond of sympathy is formed between us, inasmuch as I know you to be at least interested in the topic which is of all others the most absorbing to me.

How many good arguments with you I have missed by not understanding your attitude towards the Church ! I dearly love debate, and I know you to be a foeman more than worthy of my almost untried steel. Let us begin now, Father, and not stop until we have threshed this thing out thoroughly.

I will be the unworthy champion of the pulpit of to-day ; you will represent that large part of our business community in America which holds aloof from preachers. You have stated your belief that this aloofness is due to the illogicality of many of the Church's dogmas. Now I call on you to enumerate them—those of the Church's dogmas which have proven offensive to your ideas of reasonableness, in order that I may uphold them.

I hereby throw down the gage of battle, sir. I pray you take it up and let us cross swords and be at it without delay.

Your loving son,

ARTHUR.

Letter No. VI

THE CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

*Drexel Building, Wall Street,
New York, Feb. 10.*

My dear Arthur :

I am amused by the cheery way in which you challenge your world-worn old father to theological combat. It fits well with your youth and general optimism. But it is no light task for me to undertake. I have turned these thoughts over in my mind, off and on, for many years, but never before attempted to set them down in black and white. Nevertheless I will accept your challenge. If I do not make myself clear in some cases, you must attribute it to that ineptitude for facile expression which long years of close attention to one line of business engenders. Now, to begin :

I have found by personal inquiry extending over many years that the Christian doctrine which is most repellent to business men of common-sense—the doctrine which seems to them the most illogical—and the doctrine which is to blame more than any other for irritating large numbers of practical men to the point where they give up listening to sermons, is the doctrine of Hell Fire.

That a God who is said to be absolutely just, that a God who is said to be all-powerful, that a God who is said to be Love—should also be represented as having ordained that sinners be cast into a lake of fire, a place of eternal torment “where their worm dieth not and their fire is not quenched” seems to these practical business men to be highly illogical, utterly unreasonable and in addition, insulting to the Deity.

No creator who would deal out to his creature an infinity of torture as punishment for sins committed by that creature during a span of generally less than a hundred years, could,

as far as these practical men can see, be either just or loving. This dogma of eternal hell fire is an almost insurmountable stumbling-block in the way of the common-sense, American business man, who desires to believe in the plan of salvation unfolded in the New Testament.

Many attempts have been made to remove this stumbling-block by explaining hell away altogether, as being merely metaphorical, but the practical business man feels in his bones that if hell can be entirely explained away as being metaphorical, then heaven could also be explained away as metaphorical, should theologians have any object in doing so.

Even those who have the temerity to attempt to explain away hell can give no logical reason for their argument. Their effort seems to proceed mostly from that abhorrence for inflicting pain on man or beast which is a distinct feature of American life to-day, not yet shared by the less refined peoples.

None of these preachers I have ever met or

heard about, no matter how loath he is to preach hell fire to his congregation, or how adroitly he tries to minimize this hideous doctrine, will give you a sane and logical reason to show why it is an absurdity. Both kinds of preacher—those who uphold the old-fashioned view of hell and also those who seek to substitute some less abhorrent idea of hell—leave their disciples floundering in oceans of unreasonableness and illogicality. They offer no logical, reasonable *substitute* for a hell of eternal fire.

Now let me hear what you can say logically to uphold the Church's contradictory attitude to-day towards the dogma of eternal hell fire for the sinner.

Your affectionate father,

J. G. R.

Letter No. VII

A CALL FOR TIME

Princeton University, Feb. 11.

My dear Father :

I hasten to answer your letter of yesterday ; not because I have no need for time to meet your argument as to the Church's attitude towards the doctrine of hell fire ; but because I need so much time to answer it, that I must beg of you to proceed with your next argument before you receive my reply to your first.

I did not expect you to open on me with so heavy a gun.

Please state another of the Church's dogmas which you find to be offensively illogical and in the meantime I will be preparing my argument on hell fire.

Your loving son,

ARTHUR.

Letter No. VIII

IS GOD JUST OR UNJUST?

*Drexel Building, Wall Street,
New York, Feb. 12.*

My dear Arthur:

The church announces, without a suspicion of hesitancy in its tone, that God is absolutely and invariably just in His dealings with each and every one of His creatures and yet the church advances, to uphold that proposition, no argument which does not fail to convince a common-sense business man in the light of actual happenings which we see around us every day.

We see the wicked prospering and oppressing the poor. We see pious folk steeped in poverty and enduring great injustice, cruelty and wrong at the hands of the wicked. When we ask: "Can He be a just God who permits these things?" your church replies: "The

wicked man who prospers on this earth will be punished hereafter, while the good man who suffers on earth will be rewarded in heaven."

But no logical reason is advanced to show how the *wicked* man who *prosper*s on earth will be punished any more severely than the wicked man who does *not* prosper on earth; or how the good man who *suffer*s on earth will be rewarded in heaven in any higher degree than the *good* man who *prosper*s on earth.

We often see a truly good man who is wealthy. He has the money-making faculty, a clear brain, good health, and abundant vitality. He enjoys for many years all of those innocent pleasures that wealth can bring: good education, good music, good pictures, good food, numerous friends. He has the happiness of being able to confer many and great benefits on those he loves. He can give his children substantial advantages in the race of life. He can get for his beloved wife the best of medical skill and care, accompanied by

change of scene and air, whenever she needs it. He can give lavishly of his wealth to philanthropic causes. He may live in a country where law is respected and property rights are protected and he dies happy in the knowledge that he has earned and won the esteem and respect of his fellow men.

Just as often we see a truly good man who all his life is pinched by poverty. The Creator did not endow him with a clear brain, but with a dull one. His health is feeble, not rugged. His vitality is low. He cannot make money nor keep it. He got only a makeshift education and can give his children no better. His loved wife must bear the heavy burden of motherhood without the best of medical care. No change of air or scene can he give her; perhaps not even proper food or clothing. She must work hard in the field or factory or over the cook-stove or washtub and he must watch her sufferings unrelieved by any luxuries. He can give only sparingly to charity. He may live in a land where law is

for the rich only and the poor are oppressed and robbed. If he lives under Turkish rule, for instance, he may even have to endure seeing his daughters violated by brutal soldiery, his sons maimed for daring to defend them and his crops or goods seized for unjust taxes, levied at the whim of a rapacious tax-gatherer. In fact he spends all his days in a state of terror, poverty and helpless indignation and dies with the firm conviction that the esteem and respect of his neighbors have been withheld from him. Yet his life has been a blameless one.

If these two men both get the *same* reward hereafter, can it be said that God has dealt justly between them?

Again we often see a wicked man who prospers exceedingly in his wickedness. All his life long he fairly wallows in the sinful pleasures which wealth can bring. He commits numerous moral crimes, but can hire the cleverest lawyers to find in the statutes loopholes of escape for him. He may be elected

to the state or the national legislature and help make the laws of the land. Honors are his and substantial rewards. After years of envied existence he too dies, lamented and respected by his fellows.

In strong contrast with this man is the petty criminal who has not brains enough to keep out of jail. He spends years and years behind prison bars in gloom and bitterness. His life is made miserable by harsh jailers and bullying wardens and when his term of imprisonment is up, he often finds he cannot make a living in the outer world without resorting to crime again. Imprisonment follows imprisonment until at last the miserable wretch dies with the humiliating consciousness that his fellow citizens will thank heaven they are well rid of him.

Now when these two sinners get to the *same* hell and suffer the *same* punishment for their sins, how can it be said that God has dealt justly between them?

Yet your church leaves us to infer that both

kinds of good men will go to the same reward and that both kinds of bad men will go to the same punishment; and the injustice, the partiality, the unevenness (when the career here and hereafter of each man is considered as one existence) remain.

A demonstration which ends in an absurdity like this is evidently false in its premises and is wholly unsatisfactory to a man of common sense.

How do you, my son, uphold the Church's doctrine that God acts with absolute and invariable justness towards each of His creatures?

Your affectionate father,

J. G. R.

Letter No. IX

MORE TIME NEEDED

Princeton University, Feb. 15.

My dear Father :

Before I had been able to prepare for your first question an answer which satisfied my own idea of reasonableness, your second fell upon me. You enjoy the advantage of having your arguments all arranged through years of reflection, while I have never had such thoughts presented to my mind at all as you have raised.

But I feel sure there *must* be answers to both of them. Give me time, father, and I will find them.

Your loving son,

ARTHUR.

Letter No. X

IS SUICIDE ALWAYS A SIN ?

*Drexel Building, Wall Street,
New York, Feb. 20.*

My dear Arthur :

Do not think for a moment that I hold you to be any the less an able antagonist in this debate because you need time in which to answer my arguments. On the contrary, I am glad to see that you will not stoop to make any reply which you are not convinced in your own heart meets the issues raised by me. I have only contempt for a man who in an argument with a friend makes statements which he does not himself believe to be true ; but of which he hopes his friend will not see the falsity. I felt sure you would be perfectly sincere with me or else I would not have opened my mind to you as I have in these letters.

While you are considering, I will present

my third argument; but this will be the last one I shall advance until you have answered all I have previously said.

A third stumbling block which troubles many, though not nearly so many as the Christian church's attitude towards hell fire and its lack of logical proof of the absolute justice of God, is the Church's slack, unstable and illogical attitude towards suicide.

We are told from the pulpit that suicide is wrong for various reasons. One of the chief of these reasons is that: "We should not presume to rush unsummoned into the presence of our Maker." This is illogical because whenever we feel that we are about to die a natural death, we have no scruples about postponing that death just as long as we can by every scientific device known to the medical practitioner. Finally, when we can do no more, when all human skill fails to check the progress of the disease which has attacked us, we die and the minister says we "have been called hence."

Why is it any more disrespectful to our Maker to delay when called, than to rush in without being called? And why, if a mortal attack of physical disease is to be regarded as a "call," may we not consider a lapse into that mental state which causes a distaste for life, to be a "call" also?

Again we are told that suicide is cowardly—that the suicide takes his life for the ignoble reason that he fears to face the hardships of this world; and by escaping them through suicide, he ignominiously leaves those dependent upon him to suffer ills which he should have remained alive to avert.

But these arguments do not apply to a man who is homeless, friendless, childless, with no person in any way dependent upon him; nor perhaps to a sick man who is past earning any more, but has a small estate to divide among his dependent ones, a pittance which would only be depleted by his long illness. Moreover, more people are *afraid* of death than of anything else, as is shown by the des-

peration with which they seek to ward it off; while the suicide faces death bravely. The fact is he leaves life generally because he dislikes it—not because he fears its burdens.

Thus you see the Church has no logical reasons to show why suicide is *always* and in every instance wrong. It may argue that suicide is manslaughter, and that manslaughter is always wrong. And yet manslaughter (I use the word not in its technical, legal, narrow sense) is committed by the soldier who shoots the invading foeman and the Church has no blame for the soldier.

The frontier settler who, surrounded by bloody, cruel, and relentless savages, fights to the last cartridge, and when he sees that nothing can save his wife and daughters from capture to be followed by a fate worse than death, slays them with his own hand and then falls with his face to the foe, is exculpated by the church for killing his wife and daughters under those circumstances, although Christ said in His sermon on the mount. “Resist

not evil. Whoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

Therefore, if this taking of the lives of his wife and daughters by the settler under some circumstances is excusable, certain circumstances ought logically and consistently to excuse a person for taking his own life.

The fact of the matter is that the Church excuses in one place the man who takes human life, and accuses him in another. The Bible says bluntly: "Thou shalt *not* kill."

This conflict, this vacillation, this lack of logical authority in the tone of the Church towards the taking of human life, towards "ushering souls unsummoned into the presence of their Maker," is another feature which undermines her influence with the common sense, American business man.

Let me hear from you, my son, how you defend the church's attitude on this point.

Your affectionate father,

J. G. R.

Letter No. XI

A PERIOD OF PERPLEXITY

Princeton University, March 20.

My dear Father :

I have been brooding over your letters for a whole month, since the receipt of your last, and the more I think over the issues you have raised, the more downcast I have become. Father, I cannot refute your arguments by any logical, reasonable line of thought. The charges of illogicality, unreasonableness and of wavering which you have brought against the church in your letters, are true. I cannot deny it; but then what am I to do? What am I to think? My whole belief in revealed religion is shaken by your words. Am I then to become an atheist through the influence of my father? Is there no way of accepting the doctrine of punishment for the wicked after

death and the dogma that God is just, except by the exercise of faith—that attribute so much more characteristic of women and of children than of men? Are there no logical reasons to support these doctrines?

Father, where shall I turn? Do you really counsel me to abandon my belief in the Bible?—to become a rejector of the word of God?—to assume the attitude of the infidel? I can hardly believe that you do; but what am I to think from your letters? Is there no answer to them?

Your perplexed but loving son,

ARTHUR.

Letter No. XII

A REASSURANCE

*Drexel Building, Wall Street,
New York, March 21.*

My dear Arthur :

I hasten to reply to your honest letter of yesterday. And let me assure you at the very start that I do *not* want you to become an atheist—that I do *not* want to shake your faith in God's word and that there *are* logical, reasonable answers to *all* of my arguments.

These answers, however, you will not hear from the pulpit. The clergy do not use them—more's the pity—and that is the real reason why the profession of preaching the gospel is waning in influence and power to-day.

Logical answers to these questions I have raised with you have been demanded by the common-sense men of the laity for years, but

instead, the clergy have fed them with illogicalities that have insulted the reason by seeking to relegate that clear-seeing attribute of man to the rear and to set up in its stead the vague and variable attribute of faith.

There exists, my son, an argument which logically and reasonably proves the doctrine of hell fire to be an utter absurdity.

There exists an argument which logically and reasonably proves God to be always absolutely just towards every one of His creatures.

There exists an argument which logically and reasonably proves suicide to be always and under all circumstances wrong.

I have not time to-day to set out these three arguments succinctly. I can only promise you that I will do so very soon. I will devote one letter to each. I just write you this hurriedly in order to set your mind at rest as to what I am trying to accomplish in this debate of ours.

Your affectionate father,

J. G. R.

Letter No. XIII

HOPE RESTORED

Princeton University, March 22.

My dear Father :

I can hardly explain to you the joy which your letter of yesterday brought to me. The relief from the tremendous strain I have been under ever since I read the first argument you advanced in our debate, is indescribable. I only hope that you can allay the doubts which have racked my brain since the first of last month, as thoroughly as you aroused them. Let me hear from you, sir, I beg, as soon as you can find time to write.

Your expectant and loving son,

ARTHUR.

Letter No. XIV

THE BODY AFTER DEATH

*Drexel Building, Wall Street,
New York, March 25.*

My dear Arthur :

Before I begin to set out at length the three arguments which I outlined in my letter of March 21—I must ask you to consider with me a preliminary question, which is: “What authority do you find in the words of Christ for believing that after the *wicked* man dies, he will possess a *body* of any kind in that state of existence upon which he then enters?”

We have scriptural assurance that when the righteous pass into the next world they receive “glorified bodies.” This is just as logical, just as reasonable, just as easy to believe, as it is to believe that God gave us the bodies we now inhabit, which indeed *are* glorified

bodies compared to those which He has given to His other creatures on this sphere—the beasts, birds and fishes. It requires no violation of logical reasoning, no great stretch of the imagination, to picture an ethereal entity for my soul which would be far superior to the kind of body I here inhabit.

But Christ has not told us what kind of body (if any) will be given to the *wicked* after death. Knowing as we do from experience that our earthly bodies decay after we are dead, and are dissolved into their original elements, it would only be reasonable and logical for us to suppose (if not told otherwise) that the souls of all men (both good and bad) after death will not inhabit bodies.

But since we are told in the Scriptures that the good *will* have glorified bodies, it involves no breach of reasonableness to believe that statement. However, since we are not explicitly told by Christ that the wicked will have new bodies after they leave these earthly bodies, I hold that there are grounds on

which it is more reasonable, more logical and more advantageous for us to believe that the wicked receive *no bodies at all* in their future existence, than it is for us to believe that they do inhabit bodies in the other world.

Now I want you to study this proposition from all sides and consult all the authorities on the subject and then tell me if you can find anywhere any authoritative, explicit statement *made by Christ* that the wicked are to have bodies of any kind after death.

Let me know the result of your research along this line before I write to you again.

Your affectionate father,

J. G. R.

Letter No. XV

CHRIST'S WORDS REGARDING HELL

Princeton University, March 30.

My dear Father :

I have spent the greater part of the last four days consulting the authorities on the subject of whether we have or have not any *positive* and *unequivocal* assurance from the *lips of Christ* that the *wicked* shall have *bodies* of any kind after death, and I find that we have no such assurance.

Upon this point Christ has everywhere used language which His most reverent follower may decline to interpret literally (if he chooses) without in the least degree tainting his own orthodoxy—language which the most vehement supporter of the essential infallibility of the Bible would be completely justi-

fied in regarding as figurative, should any new light be thereby thrown upon a seemingly illogical dogma or any new explanation of a holy mystery be thereby adduced.

But the utterances of Christ which refer to the future fate of the wicked, are so numerous that for convenience' sake I have written them down in a separate document,¹ which I enclose herewith. In this document I discuss these sayings of Christ in the order in which we find them in the revised edition of the New Testament, but wherever the same remark of our Lord is reported more than once in the gospels, I have not repeated it. In the same document I have set out the course of reasoning which has convinced me that wherever Jesus speaks of the *body* of the sinner being in hell, the language is clearly figurative.

But I do not understand, father, why you should have injected this extraneous subject into our debate. What has such a question to do with those three comforting reasons that

¹ This separate document will be found at page No. 162.

you promised to give me and which were to restore my shaken belief in the Bible? Please do not delay longer in presenting them.

Your loving son,

ARTHUR.

Letter No. XVI

FIRE CANNOT BURN A DISEMBODIED SPIRIT

*Drexel Building, Wall Street,
New York, April 5.*

My dear Arthur :

Notwithstanding your characterization of my remarks about the sinner getting no body after death, as "extraneous" to my argument, I must tell you right here and now that they are absolutely vital to my argument. Each and all of those three, and as you call them "comforting" reasons, which you await so eagerly, are totally founded upon the premises that the sinner gets no body after death. Unless you admit that proposition to be a fact, these arguments I am about to present can have no weight at all with any logical mind. But once that proposition is admitted as a fact, the arguments follow naturally and reasonably.

It might be retorted by a captious debater that I am calling on you to admit something as a fact which we have not absolutely proved to be a fact. My reply to this is that much more light is thrown upon God's plan of salvation for us, by adopting the dogma that the sinner gets no body after death than by accepting the doctrine that he gets one. Now, either he gets one or he does not get one. Therefore by adopting the more reasonable of these two conclusions, and the one which throws most light upon God's plan of salvation, we are doing the best that finite men can do when considering the infinite.

Assuming therefore that you accept the theory that the wicked man gets no body after death, I will proceed to show you, in the first place—that the doctrine of eternal hell fire for the sinner as the result of sins committed on this earth, can be dismissed as a palpable absurdity and a libel upon God.

Let us take the case of an ordinary sinner, who not having used to advantage the talents

contained in his earthly body, has "even that talent which he hath" taken away from him. What happens to him as he is ushered into his new phase of existence?

Why, this :

Having left his ears and auditory nerves behind him, he can no longer *hear*.

Having left his eyes and optic nerves behind him, he can no longer *see*.

Having left his tongue, palate, and mucous membrane behind him, he can no longer *taste*.

Having left his speaking apparatus behind him, he can no longer *speak* nor *breathe*.

Having left his skin and nerves behind him, he can no longer *feel*.

Therefore fire could inflict absolutely no *pain* on such a being. Fire does not *exist* for him. Hence to suppose that such a being could or would be *punished* by fire is an absurdity.

Can you attack that line of reasoning on any ground of illogicality, Arthur? Let me see if you can.

Your affectionate father,

J. G. R.

Letter No. XVII

AN INNOCUOUS HELL NO HELL AT ALL

Princeton University, April 10.

My dear Father :

Having once gained from me an acceptance of your theory that the soul of the sinner gets no body after death—you certainly do build upon it an argument against hell fire which I cannot pick a flaw in because of any illogicality ; but all the same it seems to land you in the position of demonstrating that hell is no punishment at all—does it not ?

Do you want me to think that the fate of the wicked after death is mere extinction ? What *could* a soul do that could not hear, see, speak, breathe, feel or touch ? Do you want to make a mock of God's many threats to punish the wicked hereafter according to their deserts ? What then becomes of the eternal

justness of God which you promised to prove to me?

If you take the old-fashioned hell away and leave only an innocuous hell in its place, you eliminate a large part of the reasons which the church has always urged for the sinner to abandon his sins and lead a righteous life.

You are mystifying me, Father. Please explain more fully.

Your loving son,

ARTHUR.

Letter No. XVIII

A COMMON-SENSE HELL

*Drexel Building, Wall Street,
New York, April 15.*

My dear Arthur :

I do not for one moment believe, nor do I want you to believe, that there exists no hell where sinful souls will be duly punished after death for the sins committed in the body. Such a hell exists, of necessity, as I will prove to you. But it is not a hell of fire, nor is it a necessarily eternal punishment for any one soul.

I believe hell itself is eternal because sinners will always be dying and going to that place or into that stage of existence and some will probably always continue to sin there. In that logical and reasonable sense hell exists eternally, but in that sense alone. Whether hell is a place or a state of existence makes no

difference to our argument and we need not consider that here.

Now you seem to think that because I believe the sinner after death (having no body) can neither feel, taste, see, breathe, speak nor hear, he must therefore become practically extinct. Not at all. He can still think, remember, reason, reflect, aspire, hope, despair, and in fact exercise all the purely *mental* emotions, can he not?

If you retort that having left his brain behind, when his earthly body died, he therefore cannot think, I answer that our idiot and lunatic asylums are filled with men and women who have brains but are without mental faculties—some lacking this mental faculty and some lacking that—some lacking more mental faculties than others but all lacking some—though all having brains.

Therefore if a man can *lack* mental faculties and still have brains, it is not unreasonable or illogical to suppose that he can *possess* mental faculties and still have *no* brains.

Imagine, therefore, the soul of a wicked man at the moment it leaves his body and begins mentally to take account of its new surroundings.

“Where am I?” is its first thought.

All seems black and silent—a void. The soul sees nothing, hears nothing, touches nothing.

Presently it becomes aware that some one is addressing it. No words are spoken or heard, but the newly arrived soul is conscious of a companion.

“Where am I?” asks the newcomer.

“You are in hell,” is the reply.

And then the exchange of thought can logically and reasonably be imagined to take place about as follows between the newly arrived soul and the soul that has been long in hell (for convenience sake, we will call them respectively A and B):

A (the newcomer). “Where are you? I cannot see you.”

B. “How can one see without eyes?”

A. "Am I blind? Have my eyes failed me?"

B. "You have no eyes."

A. "No eyes? Why not?"

B. "Because you have no body."

A. "How do I hear you then?"

B. "Is my voice harsh or soft, male or female, low or loud?"

A. "Now that I consider it, I do not hear any voice. But I know you are speaking."

B. "You do not hear because you have no ears. I do not speak to you because I have no throat, nor tongue, nor lungs, with which to produce sound. My spirit it is, and my spirit only, which is communing with yours."

A. "You say I am in hell?"

B. "Yes."

A. "I expected as much. But how can I suffer the tortures of hell fire without any body to be burned?"

B. "How indeed? The tortures here are mental."

A. "The Bible said they were physical."

B. "Some persons thought it did, and so they taught many who did not think for themselves. Other persons thought it did not."

A. "It was often difficult to understand just what the Bible did mean, in that old life."

B. "It is just as difficult here."

A. "Don't you know any more of the destiny of man than you did before you came here?"

B. "Something, but not much. We know that the good when they died, received wonderfully endowed ethereal entities which for lack of a better word we may call 'glorified bodies.' That because they made good use of their weak, earthly bodies, they now possess all of their old senses and powers which can bring them any sort of physical or mental benefit and also additional powers, senses, abilities and faculties that we know nothing of, but can dimly imagine. We know that when they received these glorified entities or spiritualized bodies, their souls *began that new*

life just in the state of moral advancement in which they were when they left the earth.

“ But the mystery of life is now made clear to them and with their new powers they steadily advance in all things that are good and delightful; while we, who misused our earthly bodies, are plunged into ‘outer darkness.’ We know not even where we are in relation to the other parts of the universe. There is no sun, nor moon, nor stars, nor locality for us. We know not whether hell is a place or a mere stage of our existence. For us it has no metes nor bounds. For us it is as wide as the universe itself. We simply know that we exist in company with one another and we can communicate our thoughts to one another, but as to our future, we know no more for certain, than we did when we were on earth.”

A. “ The terrors and sorrows of this state—this hell, as you call it—do not then seem to be very great. What are they? ”

B. “ The sorrows of hell are manifold.

True, we are not condemned here to writhe forever in the exquisite torture of unquenchable flame, nor is the prospect of improving our lot absolutely hopeless, but after I have told you of the mental sufferings we endure, you will, I am sure, consider our case sufficiently sad to make any one strive to escape it.

“When you were on earth you doubtless have witnessed the prostration of spirit which seizes a man when he loses reputation, honor and fortune at such an age that he cannot start anew. Such melancholy the convict sentenced to imprisonment for life feels; such melancholy we feel here. This great melancholy sinks us. It breeds in us such listlessness and dejection that it seems to prevent the soul from making almost any effort at all which requires courage or persistence—any effort to elevate itself, to improve itself, to aim at or even hope for salvation. Think of what we suffer here from envy alone—that canker of the heart—as we contemplate the great contrast between our fate and the happy

and constantly improving lot of the blessed, coupled with the firm conviction that ours tends to grow worse and worse—how bad we do not know.

“Another of our sorrows is the paucity of means for improving or even maintaining one’s present moral condition here.

“Yet another is the terrible power which the great mass of bitter, hating, and malevolent minds, gathered here, has upon yours to depress and degrade it.

“The science of thought-transference had been little explored on the earth when I left it. Here all communication is carried on in that way and that which we used to call hypnotizing and was done with an effort on earth, is oftentimes done unconsciously here and can be accomplished with ease when a dozen or a score or a hundred combine to overpower one other mind.

“So that in a place like this, to which the wicked and only the wicked have been coming since the first man died on earth, the vast

preponderance of minds are filled with enmity against God, malice, stupidity, ignorance, ingratitude, grossness, hate, avarice, arrogance, vanity, blasphemy, covetousness, stubbornness, sensuousness, cupidity, cruelty, discontent, surliness, envy, selfishness, egotism, suspicion, fierceness, ribaldry, revengefulness, fraud, perversity, fanaticism, greed, pride, harshness, insolence, irritability, irreverence, meanness, insubordination, intolerance, malevolence, intemperance, impiety, lust, lying, and many other vices, and it is a hard matter indeed for the repentant, struggling and aspiring soul to make any headway against this sodden moral atmosphere, that here surrounds it and weighs it down.

“The *intensifying* tendency of all vices when *long* practiced, was not much understood on earth. Our lives did not endure long enough there to demonstrate it fully. Here you feel it in all its dreadful perfection.

“For instance, the man who indulged a spirit of hatred all his life on earth, started

his new life here with a strong bent for hatred and after a few centuries of hating, without once experiencing that relief which comes from inflicting harm upon the object of one's hatred, he is constantly tortured with a wholly unsatisfied, unavenged, and unavengeable hatred for all things, including God and himself.

“The jealous have by brooding over the subject become sure that the blessed did not deserve heaven any more than they themselves did.

“The proud have become too proud to seek forgiveness even if it were to be had, now that they have defied God and thrown their chances away.

“The selfish can no longer gloat over possessing things which their fellows must go without, but are constantly tortured by thinking of all those things which are denied them but which the blessed enjoy with their glorified bodies, for we know ‘that as the thing more perfect is, the more it feels of pleasure.’

“There are misers here who have grown so miserly that the flight of time only means for them years and years and years in which the riches they left behind on earth might have been piling up interest for *them* instead of for their heirs.

“The envious have envied the blessed so long that they have at last come to hate the innocent objects of their envy.

“And so it goes all along the line. The mental vices which men practiced in their brief lives on earth, they have continued, from force of habit, to practice here; until after a few centuries these vices seem to have become totally inseparable from their souls, and each vice is its own particular scourge for the soul it inhabits.

“A majority of the souls here, moreover, cling to the belief that their punishment is to be eternal just because they thought so on earth. They have no hope of salvation. *They ‘have not even any hope of death.’*

“The despair this brings them is indescr-

bable and what is worse, it also hinders them from making any effort to improve themselves."

A. "Do you then hope to improve your lot?"

B. "I hope I may."

A. "On what do you found that hope?"

B. "Partly on reason and partly on revelation."

A. "What is the reason on which your hope is partly founded?"

B. "A large number of the souls here who aspire to better their condition, have, by long years of discussion, reflection and observation of the mental condition of our fellows in hell, come pretty unanimously to the conclusion that each commission of a sin, whether in the body or out of the body, has the direct and inevitable effect of degrading the moral nature to a certain extent. This extent varies with the different sins. The degradation manifests itself in each case in an *increased tendency* to commit that sin again. Our conclusions

also lead us to believe that each practice of a virtue, whether practised in the body or out of the body, has the direct and inevitable effect of elevating the moral nature to a certain degree. This degree varies with the different virtues. The elevation manifests itself in an *increased tendency* to practice that virtue again. On that point I may say we are practically unanimous.

“On the point of whether a being who has by the practice of many virtues, so elevated his nature that he is fitted to enter heaven—whether such a one, I say, has the *right* to enter there by reason of the sacrifice and death of Christ, without, maybe, even knowing that such a sacrifice was ever made for him, we are not unanimous; although those who maintain that such a right exists and is recognized, point for confirmation to the fact that there are far fewer souls of those whom Christians call ‘the heathen’ here, than are the numbers of heathen who have died since man existed on the earth. These claim that

since God knows all things, He knew from the beginning that Christ would some day die for man, and therefore men who died before Christ did, were covered by His sacrifice, just as well as men who have died since.

“Others of us here maintain that no such right as I have mentioned exists, but that after a soul has fitted itself by repeated acts of virtue for entry into heaven, it must, before entering heaven, and as a prime condition of entry, obtain forgiveness from God for any and all sins it has at any time committed, and must believe in His name, and will then obtain entry to heaven only as an act of mercy, and grace, granted for Christ’s sake by God, and not as a right.

“However, as I said before, we are unanimous in believing that each man *must make his own soul fit* for entry into heaven, before it can either claim the right of entry from God or expect the grace of entry to be extended to it by God, and we are also unanimous in believing that the only way to fit the soul for either

kind of entry is by the *repeated practice* of the virtues. *Belief* in virtue is not enough. Incessant *practice* is absolutely necessary. The *debasement* effect which the practice of sin has upon the soul, can only be effaced by counteracting it with the *elevating* effect which the practice of virtue has upon the soul.

“We are also unanimous in believing that when by long and incessant practice of the virtues such a strong habit of doing right has been formed that all tendency to commit sin is eradicated from the soul and its *only* tendency is to practice virtue, that soul is perfect. But before that perfect state is reached, there is a stage in the upward progress of the soul, where its tendency to practice virtue is *greater* on the whole than its tendency to commit sin, and when *that* stage is reached, though *all* tendency to commit sin is not wholly eradicated, we believe that God in His infinite mercy forgives and releases the soul (if it is truly repentant for its sins and shortcomings and humbly petitions God for forgiveness) from

this bodiless hell and somewhere in His universe allows it to avail itself once more of a body, with the aid of which it may at last make up its spiritual deficiencies and by the grace of God attain perfection."

A. "Next tell me what is the revelation of which you spoke a while ago as the basis for your hope of winning from here to heaven."

B. "Long, long ago, a soul came here who said he was part of God, sent from God, to say that if souls here sought to do all they could to make themselves fit for a better state of existence, they would, if they believed in Him, be allowed to reach one. He was scoffed at, however. Most of the souls here then had passed their lives on earth without having heard of any God but the heathen gods. Some of the souls who knew what He meant when He said He came from God and had descended into hell to preach to the souls in purgatory and that He was a Saviour yesterday, to-day and forever, have by a constant indulgence in mental vices here, grown so mali-

cious and embittered that they deny that this celestial visitor ever came to hell at all, in order that they may deceive and discourage any who might take heart from this revelation and try to improve their condition. There is no Bible here, no written or printed record of this heavenly messenger's words. Only tradition ; and when even that is denied by many, the majority of the inhabitants of this place, being ignorant and unintellectual (as the majority is of those who are coming here from the earth even yet) do not benefit much by that tradition."

A. "Were you a Christian while on earth?"

B. "Yes."

A. "So was I. Therefore we know that this tradition must be true for we are told that after His crucifixion, Christ descended into hell and preached to the souls in purgatory and He certainly would preach a possible salvation to them, else He could not be their, your, my Saviour yesterday, to-day and for-

ever. The thought fills me with hope. I desire to get to heaven more now than I ever did before and it really seems to me that it will be easier to win our way to heaven from here than it would be to do so from the earth."

B. "How do you arrive at that conclusion?"

A. "Why, while I was on earth I had many aspirations to lead a better life, but it was always my accursed *body* that prevented my realizing those aspirations. My body it was which weighted me down with its thirst, and hunger, and love of ease and luxury, with its lust, with its frequent pains, destroying the temper and causing peevishness and impatience; with its love of fine clothing and houses and wealth. But now that I am rid of that weak body, now that I am all soul, I feel that it will be a comparatively easy matter to reform and lead a better life. I will set about it at once."

B. "Good. What will you do first?"

A. "I will begin to weed out of my soul

the sin which I most indulged in upon earth. I was ever selfish. I lived mainly for myself, until selfishness became part of my nature; but now I will cultivate generosity, that thereby my soul may be made somewhat more fit than it is now to enter heaven."

B. "You will be generous, eh? Well, what will you give away? Money? Clothing? Food? Have you any here to give? No. Do any of us here want those things? No. And if you had vast quantities of those things, how would it elevate your nature to give away what you could not possibly use? It is only the self-denial involved in giving that elevates the soul of the giver."

A. "Your point is well taken. To give away while on earth money, food, or other things which my body then craved would have had a good effect on me, but I neglected the opportunity. Well, if I may not practice generosity here, then I will practice chastity?"

B. "But you have no body with which to

be unclean, libidinous, adulterous, lecherous, unchaste. You can see no sight here to excite carnal passion. How shall you restrain yourself from doing what it is impossible for you to do? How remove from your soul the debasing effects of repeated indulgences in lasciviousness, when there is no person or thing here which can supply even a temptation, much less a gratification, that you might gain spiritual strength by resisting or declining?"

A. "I see now that when I had a passionate, lascivious *body* was the time to have schooled my soul in resisting temptation to or declining the gratification of lust. It is too late now. But if I may not practice generosity or chastity here, I will set about restraining my avaricious nature. Henceforth I will not covet my neighbor's possessions."

B. "Covet what? You have all that any one else has here."

A. "I will not steal."

B. "There is nothing here to steal."

A. "I will not kill, nor be tyrannical, nor

cruel, nor seek revenge, nor indulge in gluttony, nor drunkenness, nor gambling, nor cheating, nor any sin of that kind to which I was so prone on earth."

B. "Of course you will not, because you cannot. I tell you no one can voluntarily abstain here from a single sin which he committed with the help of his *body* on earth and therefore it follows that he cannot elevate his spiritual nature by the practice of a single virtue which would tend directly to eradicate from his make-up the deterioration which the commission of those sins wrought upon his spiritual being while on earth; or in other words to eradicate that tendency to commit them which long practice of them has made a part of his very nature. He cannot practice generosity, unselfishness, self-denial, charity, purity, temperance, mercy, chastity, or sobriety in any effective degree here?"

A. "Then indeed I begin to perceive that instead of blaming my poor *body* for my many shortcomings on earth, I should have looked

upon its weaknesses, its desires, its frailty as so many *opportunities* bountifully provided by my Maker for the purification and improvement of my soul, until it should become fit to enter upon a higher sphere of existence. But surely you have not enumerated all the virtues which good men practice. There must be others. Let me think. I have it. I will practice patience. I will be humble. I will not curse God or my fate. I will not envy the blessed."

B. "That is, you will submit to what you cannot resist. You will not covet what you know you cannot get. Not curse the Being in whose favor your only hope lies. It seems to me you may practice those *little* virtues a long time without wiping out the stains of the many sins you committed on earth; and without elevating yourself to a state fit to associate with those who when they had *bodies*, practiced the grand virtues—not such contemptible little ones as humility—a lap-dog virtue at best. You see a soul that was filled, say, with

humility, if it were admitted to heaven and provided with a new and spiritualized or glorified *body* could not be trusted on that ground only to refrain from the practice of dishonesty, lechery, and a dozen other sins the tendency to commit which had become, through practice of those sins on earth, part of its spiritual nature."

A. "Then I will practice honesty, devotion, peacefulness, cheerfulness, contentment, reverence, obedience, faith, hopefulness, gentleness, diligence, candor, conscientiousness, dutifulness, piety, perseverance, pity, trustfulness, tolerance, modesty, love, fairness, justice, and sympathy. Surely one does not need a body to practice these."

B. "It is true that those virtues you have just named can be practiced to a *certain limited extent* without a body and in that fact lies our hope of escape from this state of existence, but if you will think it over you will see that all of them could be practiced *much more frequently* if we had *bodies*. Take honesty, for

instance. It was always easy to be honest when there was nothing to gain by deceit, and nothing to lose by candor. What could you gain here by lying to or cheating your fellows? Devotion to a person or cause is much more easy to maintain when something is to be gained thereby, than when suffering, persecution, poverty, disgrace, hunger, thirst, blows, prison, are to be endured because of it. Who will do you harm here if you practice devotion? The same remarks apply to the rôle of peacemaker here. You can only *advise* peace here and advice was always the easiest thing to give away that we had on earth. Obedience is good discipline when it involves carrying out a distasteful or onerous command. Who will give you commands here? You can be as gentle as you like here, but how could you be rough? What will you be diligent at? At thinking? Some of the laziest men on earth were constant thinkers. What difficulties or dangers will you persevere in the face of? Will you be tolerant of the habits or be-

liefs of those you cannot control? Of course you will, but it would have been better to have practiced tolerance on earth towards those you did control. Love works its highest good on that man who sacrifices most for it. What will you sacrifice here? Justice goes out from the powerful to the weak. You are no stronger than the rest of us now. Pity, sympathy, piety, in the abstract, never did much to elevate that man on earth who never let his sympathy, pity, piety, lead to the performance of any active benevolence upon the objects of his pity or sympathy. Moreover and above all, you would be practicing those virtues, on those *rare* occasions when you could find a chance to do so without a body to provide opportunities for you, with a really selfish motive—the redemption of your own individual soul from hell; and selfishness sinks and degrades the soul more surely than any other vice;—more than the practice of a few somewhat colorless and passive virtues could offset.

“Suppose once more that having practiced all these purely mental virtues for a long period, your soul should be admitted to the sphere of the blessed, and receive a spiritualized and glorified body, full of the pulses of youth and health, do you suppose your soul could be trusted to use that body aright?—your soul that was still imbued with a strong tendency to indulge in the active vices of selfishness, greed, avariciousness, pride, arrogance, lechery, tyranny, cruelty, deceit, overreaching, intemperance, thievery, gluttony—still imbued with these vices because you had found no opportunity here in hell to acquire the habit of practicing their opposites? Would you not quickly introduce a *discordant* note into heaven? I think you would. Yet some of us are convinced that after we have for a long time practiced here such virtues as we can find opportunity to practice, we may set up in ourselves so strong a tendency to practice *virtue* on *all* occasions, as will offset the tendency to practice *vice* on *all* occasions, which

was established in our spiritual natures by the practice of vice while we were in the body. Then we may be trusted with another body. But when one considers how *few* will be the opportunities offered here to practise those virtues which can be practised without a *body* to provide the opportunity, the outlook is indeed dark.

A. "Do you see any ray of light?"

B. "Yes. God does not wish to keep us here. He will take us from here just as soon as we fit ourselves for a change and ask His forgiveness for our sins and shortcomings with genuine repentance. Just as soon as I or you or any one here can train his spirit so that he shall always have a stronger tendency to do good than to do evil, though his tendency to do evil be not *entirely* eliminated, God is willing to entrust us with another opportunity, another body."

A. "How will you set about reaching that stage of spiritual attainment?"

B. "Well, I have brooded over this subject

for many long years and I have come to the conclusion that besides practising all the mental virtues I can without a body, some means must be found here in hell for the practice of some sort of wholly *unselfish* self-denial in order that the fallen state of our souls may be appreciably improved."

A. "Why self-denial?"

B. "Because Christ said when the lawyer asked Him which was the chief commandment: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and the great commandment and the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

"Now I cannot love God or my neighbor by just resolving to do so. Disinterested love is only engendered in the human breast by making sacrifices for that object which it is desired to love. Therefore, if I can find any form of unselfish self-sacrifice, any form of de-

nying myself for God or for my fellows here, I am going to practice *that*."

A. "Do you think you have found any way, then, of practicing such self-denial here?"

B. "I think so. Perhaps so; perhaps not. Who can tell? But my plan is this:

"One of the few alleviations of our disappointment in hell is to revolve over and over in our minds memories of the pleasures we enjoyed when we had bodies. The drunkard recalls again the delightful feelings which accompanied the slaking of his thirst for liquor. The glutton devours once more in memory the favorite dishes he ate on earth. The libertine wallows in the reminiscences of his former debauches. The proud review their triumphs. The selfish dwell on the good things they once possessed and so on through all the list.

"But the indulgence in these memories is nothing more or less than re-indulgence in the commission of those sins. Therefore my plan is to bar from my mind resolutely all

indulgence in these degrading memories and to recall to mind as often as possible those few unselfish and ennobling acts which I performed with the aid of my body when I had one; and by dwelling on the uplifting influence which those produced upon me, try to elevate my own lost soul a little.

“Moreover I will resolutely dismiss from my mind all hope of ever leaving here. I will also endeavor to persuade my fellow lost souls to give up selfishly seeking to go to heaven from here; but instead, to devote themselves to creating a sort of minor heaven right here for their fellows. I will also assiduously practice every virtue which I can practice without the aid of a body.”

A. “And do you think, that after ages of this kind of effort, you will attain a state of spiritual advancement where your tendency to do right will overbalance your tendency to do wrong?”

B. “I believe so. However, I will not allow myself to think of that. I hope though,

that my fellows here will be made happier by my efforts and that God will be pleased at seeing them made happier."

A. "Have you accomplished any good yet: brought any soul around to your views?"

B. "A few. You, yourself, have afforded me some opportunity to do good by directing you and enlightening you and keeping you from that total despair which often overwhelms souls on their arrival here and which might have overwhelmed you had some malevolent lost soul misinformed you as to what and where you are and what is the nature of that sphere of your existence upon which you are now entering."

A. "You certainly have helped me. I will try to follow your example and so order my existence here that I may fit myself for something better. I am indeed relieved to find that hell is not a lake of fire and that it is not necessarily an eternal punishment for any one soul; but I am filled with regret as I

realize that the chances I have here of improving my spiritual nature are infinitely less in number than they were when I possessed that weak and frail *body* on which I blamed so many of my sins. I now perceive that life in the *body* is indeed synonymous with *opportunity*.”

The foregoing seems to me, Arthur, my son, to depict a common-sense hell—to be a *logical* and *reasonable* deduction from the premises, already conceded by you, that the soul of the sinner receives no *body* after he leaves this earth.

Let those who choose to believe, or who *can* believe in hell fire, cling to that doctrine, if they will; but let those who cannot bring themselves to believe in a hell of never ending physical torture from unquenchable flame, reflect on this *common-sense hell*, and see if it does not exculpate God from the charge of being a monster of vindictive cruelty while at the same time full recognition is given to the

fact that sin *must* be punished with a degree of severity which will impel the sinner to seek to avoid that punishment with all his energy.

What do you, my son, think of the hell here depicted?

J. G. R.

Letter No. XIX
IS GOD VINDICTIVE?

Princeton University, April 20.

My dear Father :

Your sketch of a hell without fire is a *logical* and reasonable deduction from the conceded premises that the sinner's soul gets no *body* after death, and certainly you have substituted for hell fire a form of mental punishment which, although it falls far short of the traditional horrors of the bottomless pit, is yet sufficiently terrible to spur any man into an effort to escape it. I have often wondered why God gave us such feeble and passionate bodies. Now I know. You have shown me that they are the wonderful *tools* by which we may fit our still more wonderful *souls* for a higher state of existence. But there is one point you have not cleared up; and that is

the objection which you yourself raised against the church's doctrine that God is *love*, while yet He condemns the souls of sinners to the terrible doom you have outlined, just because of the committal of the comparatively few sins they had time to commit during their brief lives upon earth.

Is not the punishment, even in your common-sense and fireless hell, so far in excess of the sin, that it suggests a vindictive God, rather than a God of love?

Your loving son,

ARTHUR.

Letter No. XX

GOD IS NOT VINDICTIVE

*Drexel Building, Wall Street,
New York, April 25.*

My dear Arthur :

It seems to me that there is nothing vindictive or revengeful on the part of God in permitting sinners after death to go to a hell such as I have described. On the other hand it seems impossible that He should do otherwise. For these souls could not be allowed to associate with the souls of the good, because that would be unfair to the good, who having made a proper use of their frail bodies on earth, have received glorified and spiritualized bodies or entities with which they may push on to perfection. These could not in the nature of things associate with the disembodied spirits of the wicked any more than

we could associate with disembodied spirits on earth.

If God gave to the wicked in the next world bodies which were less frail and more perfect than those He gave in this, their wicked moral natures would commit more sin and do more harm with those superior bodies than they did with their frail earthly bodies. The popular idea of a devil—a malignant soul in a supernaturally efficient body—is an illustration of what I mean.

On the other hand to the souls of the wicked God would be showing no kindness by allowing them to take their earthly bodies into hell with them, because they had already demonstrated on earth that they would *not* use those bodies to elevate themselves with, but rather to debase themselves with. They had their opportunity here on earth when each had a body and would not avail himself of it.

In all probability if they had lived five hundred years on earth, instead of less than one hundred, they would have been five times

more debased when they came to die (through steady misuse of their bodies and manifold repetition of sins resulting in a confirmed tendency to sin on all occasions) than they were when they did die.

They had plenty of warning. In the Bible there is repeated again and again the statement that the foolish or wicked servant who makes an ill use or no use at all of the talent intrusted to him, will have his original talent taken away from him. In taking away from them the talent (the body) which they used for their own degradation, God did not deprive them of all chance of redemption, but the fact that their chances to improve in hell are fewer than their chances to improve were on earth, is not to be imputed to God but rather they themselves are to blame, for they spurned the chances the body afforded and they would have continued to degrade themselves by a wicked use of the body as long as they had a body.

That the kind of hell I have outlined is

eternal, is also a matter of necessity. Sinners will always be dying and their souls will always be passing into that state of existence. And some of the sinners in hell will always be committing new sins. Some will always be refusing to yield a loving response to God's undying love, some will be rejecting throughout all eternity that peace and joy which accompanies reconciliation with God, some will always be in a state of active rebellion, separation and alienation from God, and just so long as this attitude towards God continues, so long also must the self-inflicted punishment that is inherent in such a state of mind continue. For even a loving God cannot coerce love, and to forgive sins *before* the sinner is repentant, only hardens the sinner in his evil doing. But the punishment brought on sinners in hell by their own sins is not necessarily eternal *for any one soul*, and the way for a soul in hell to make himself worthy of heaven is within reach of all, as we have seen.

This frees God from the awful calumny of

deliberately condemning a soul to a never-ending punishment for the sins committed during a few years on earth. The sins committed by the wicked in hell, if continued indefinitely, will, of course, *necessitate* an indefinite banishment from heaven; but this punishment follows inherently upon the sin, and cannot be attributed to vengefulness on the part of God.

This line of argument touches now so closely upon that which I will use to prove to you the absolute justness of God towards every one of His creatures, that I will end this letter here and take up that subject with you to-morrow.

Your affectionate father,

J. G. R.

Letter No. XXI

THE JUSTNESS OF GOD

*Drexel Building, Wall Street,
New York, April 26.*

My dear Arthur :

You have admitted that it is reasonable and that it throws new light upon God's plan of salvation to suppose that the soul of the sinner gets no body to inhabit after that sinner's death. That admission has led us logically, step by step, to the conclusion that this earthly body is the chief instrument by which we, through the grace of God, may prepare our souls to enter heaven. If you admit this second proposition to be true, I can prove to you logically that God is just. But I cannot prove it otherwise, nor have I met any one who can. On any *other* basis God seems to be highly unjust and partial and to show abso-

lutely unaccountable favoritism to some of His creatures, while He loads others with stupendous handicaps.

Let me start by relating an extreme case of seemingly divine injustice which came under my own observation. I take an extreme case because that will afford a supreme test of God's justice or partiality.

A young man of my native village, whom I will call C, after courting the most beautiful girl of all that countryside, entered into an engagement to marry her. We will call the girl B. She had been piously brought up. She was modest, pure, innocent and good. Her parents were poor. His parents were well-to-do and worldly and desired a better match for their son—better from a financial point of view. They had no possible objection to the girl herself. C was afraid to brave their anger by announcing the engagement. He besought B to marry him secretly. She refused.

He was a youth of fast habits though she

did not know it. Calling on her one night when her parents were out of town on a visit, he easily induced her to eat some candy which was drugged. Before she recovered from the effects of the drug, the man she loved and trusted had accomplished her ruin. With all the solemnity he was able to feel, he tried, when she realized the wrong that had befallen her, to assuage her tears and indignant lamentations with a promise that he would make her his bride before all the world if their secret was ever in danger of being found out. He thought that he now had her in his power sufficiently to insure a continuance of guilty relations between them. But he had underestimated the virtuous nature of the girl. Scornfully she repulsed him, and dearly as she loved him, she assured him he would never see her alone again until she was his acknowledged and lawful wife.

She persisted in this resolution for some weeks, but weakened when he threatened to go away from home, change his name, and

never return. As an alternative he made a solemn vow that he would marry her instantly, in spite of paternal wrath or of anything else, if their guilty secret should ever be discovered.

The weak girl, fearing desertion and still loving the man, yielded under this solemn promise of marriage. Before long she was obliged to tell her lover that she was about to become a mother and that he must now fulfil his promise. The hound fled that night, leaving no clew by which he could be traced. He left no property from which she could have collected damages, had she had worldliness enough to sue him or make any claim against his parents. But she had not the spirit for that. Her heart was broken over the treachery, the despicable meanness, of the man she loved. Her stern old father found her in tears. Guessing at her secret when he learned that her lover had disappeared, he wrung a confession from her and harshly ordered her out of his house. She sought the great city

of New York in which to hide her shame. General housework was the only remunerative kind of toil she had the skill to perform, but she was unable to get employment for long. As soon as her condition was observed, she was turned away. Finally, almost starving, she, in her ignorance of the wickedness of great cities, answered an attractive looking advertisement in a newspaper. Calling at the comfortably furnished house indicated, she was received by the white haired, good-natured looking mistress, who at once hired her, in spite of her condition, at good wages, and put her to work in the kitchen. The other servants were kind and the work was light. The mistress kept a boarding house for young ladies, B was told. It was three or four days before she was allowed to learn that she was in a house of ill-fame. At first she wanted to leave it; but she had not a cent of her own money left, and the place was so comfortable, the work so light, the wages so high and her coming confinement (for which

some money must be saved) was so near at hand, that she weakly hesitated. "After all," she thought in bitter despair, "the world draws little distinction between such as I am and such as the people in this house are, and I must live." No attempt was made to introduce her to the men who visited the house. So she stayed.

When the time for her confinement approached, the mistress of the house would not hear of B going to a hospital. She was told of the terrible things that might happen to her there and was frightened with stories of how the surgeons loved to experiment, for the good of the rich, upon the bodies of the sick poor. The best of care and attention were promised her by the mistress of the house if she would remain where she was. So B remained. The child was born and in a few weeks died. B grieved bitterly for her babe, but could not help feeling, through it all, that it was better so, for both of them.

Meantime expenses had been running up.

They had all been defrayed by the mistress of the house who would not listen to B's profuse thanks for her generosity. However the mistress had not neglected to procure B's signature to sundry "promises to pay" after her recovery. With the restoration of health, even sorrow could not prevent a return of B's beauty of face and figure. When she spoke about going to work again in the kitchen, she was informed that all the help that was needed was employed there already. It was not long before poor B was gently but firmly made aware that she was expected to become one of the "lady boarders." With all her soul she rebelled at this and essayed to leave the house at once. Suddenly, the heretofore indulgent mistress, changed into the cruel procuress. A corrupt police administration was then in power and a policeman in the secret pay of the house was called in to arrest B for debt. Even the clothes B had on were the property of the mistress, as B's own signature showed. Her own working clothes had vanished while

she was ill. She was ignorant of her rights before the law. The policeman cowed her with his brutal threats and his grim account of the jail he would take her to. In mortal fear she tried to run from the house. A blow on the head from the policeman's club knocked her senseless. When she came to, she realized that her degradation had again been accomplished. She had no clothes now, but a night dress and the door of her room (an inner room with no outlet upon street or yard) was locked on the outside. Here she was kept a prisoner until she had been literally starved and cajoled by turns into submission.

She remained an inmate of that house for several years. Then a reform police administration came into power, the house was raided suddenly one night by the police and B, with six other inmates, was sent to prison. The humiliations of prison life ate into B's heart and when she got out, self-respect seemed to have almost entirely left her. She took to drink to drown her sorrows. She went from

bad to worse, according to the gradations which obtain in the ranks of outcasts. She finally became a confirmed opium-eater. Missionaries tried hard to save her. From them I learned her painful history. But their efforts were in vain. She gradually became as impure and as defiled in her mind as in her body. Disease attacked her and her "market value" fell so low that she finally could make a living only in resorts for the lowest sort of Chinamen and negroes. About fifteen years after she came to New York she was mortally injured in a drunken brawl in a Bowery brothel and died in a few days, cursing and unrepentant.

During those fifteen years, the man who had started this once pure and innocent girl on the downward road, had prospered. He had fled to the West and had been lucky in mining ventures and in real estate. After making a fortune he retired from active business to enjoy it. A severe illness set him thinking of the hereafter. He almost died and in his fear,

vowed that if God would spare his life he would atone for his great sin. The sincerity of his repentance was apparent from the fact that on recovering, he came back east to his native town, took up the trail of the girl where it had vanished in this great city, and declared that he would find her and marry her, if she were still willing, in order that he might make all the reparation possible. As he traced her desperate history by means of police records and mission society reports, his sorrow was pitiful. He told me all about it and I really thought he would commit suicide, through brooding over her terrible fate and the fact that it was impossible for him to make her any reparation. The remainder of his life and the greater part of his fortune he devoted to the rescue of such other fallen women as would allow anybody to rescue them. Many a Magdalene lived to thank him for plucking her from the gutter and giving her a start upon the road to respectability again ; but he never forgot the

woman he had thrust into the mire and that kept him always humble and repentant. After a score of years passed in this work, while giving many other evidences daily of a great and true piety, he died, and if ever a man went to heaven, he did.

Now tell me, Arthur, what *logical, common-sense* argument the church can advance to prove that God, looking upon the seducer in heaven and upon his once innocent victim in hell, can declare that He has acted with *perfect impartiality* between this woman and this man.

Your affectionate father,

J. G. R.

Letter No. XXII

A HARD RIDDLE TO SOLVE

Princeton University, May 1.

My dear Father :

Your last letter certainly presents a case for consideration which makes a strong draft upon one's faith, if he wishes to believe that God found some way to do that wretched girl justice. But I can think of no way to demonstrate logically and clearly how this could be done. As you truly said in a former letter, I have been taught by my spiritual advisers that when the wicked man dies, he is punished by being sent to hell ; and that when the good man dies, he is rewarded by being sent to heaven. But this sort of doctrine leaves one to infer that the good man who has prospered on earth, will go to exactly the

same heaven as the good man who has met all kinds of misfortunes on earth ; and also that the bad man who prospers on earth, will go to exactly the same hell as the bad man who suffers hardship all his life upon this earth.

If this be true, then certainly great favoritism and partiality are shown, if we consider the life of man here and hereafter as one existence of the soul.

But inadequate as the church's doctrine is to explain such cases as I have mentioned, it seems *preposterously inadequate* to explain such a case as we have in your history of the girl and the man, where the wrong-doer must be admitted to have entered on an eternity of happiness when he died (admitted, that is, by all who believe that sincere repentance, followed by good works, and faith in God's willingness to forgive, is the road to salvation) and where his victim must be admitted to have gone to hell (admitted, that is, by all who believe that evil works, unrepentance,

and neglect to obtain forgiveness from God, is the way to earn damnation).

Can you explain this sad riddle logically, father? I shall indeed be surprised if you can.

Your loving son,
ARTHUR.

Letter No. XXIII

GOD'S JUSTICE PROVEN

*Drexel Building, Wall Street,
New York, May 5.*

My dear Arthur :

If the girl, B, when she found that her lover had been false to her, or at any other stage of her career, had said to herself :

“ True, I have been ruined and abandoned by a villain, but I will endeavor as hard as I can to forgive him.

“ True, I am henceforth to be ostracized by moral people, but I will try as hard as I can not to hate them for so doing, or to envy them their spotless records.

“ Henceforth I will have a hard and bitter struggle to earn a living, but I will work my fingers to the bone, I will endure actual star-

vation, to the death even, before I will again prostitute my body, and I will spend the remainder of my days repenting of my sins, seeking forgiveness from God, and trying to raise those who have fallen even lower than I have.”

And if she had stuck to those vows, through thick and thin, she would have elevated her spiritual nature and prepared herself for entry by the grace of God into a better world. And the elevation of her spiritual nature would have proceeded *exactly in proportion* to the *heaviness* of the *burden* placed upon her by her deceiver and by the world.

What I mean by that is, that if the man should do anything which would make it *easy* for her to forgive him, her forgiving of him would then elevate her spiritual nature in a *lesser* degree than if he had done nothing to make it easy for her. In fact if he had subsequently traduced her, or hounded her, or persecuted her, or in any way made it *harder* for her to forgive him than it was after his

first act of treachery—and if yet after all, she *did* forgive him—the uplifting of her spiritual nature would thereby be the greater still.

Again, if social ostracism proved not so severe in her case, as it generally does, then her forbearance with that trait of society, and her abstention from indulging in hatred towards society, would be *less* uplifting to her spiritual nature, than if the ostracism were most severe and yet she endured it with patience and fortitude.

Moreover, if it proved *easy* for her to earn a living without sin, her abstention from adopting sinful methods to earn a living would not uplift her spiritual nature in so *great* a degree as would be the case if she had to struggle hard and endure much privation and hunger, in order to make a living without sin.

Hence we see that God was willing to make all the sorrows which befell this woman, stepping stones by which she might have obtained a high degree of fitness for the better world, if she had accepted the chance which was

always open to her, up to the last day of her life on earth.

As for the man in such case, the ease with which he escaped the first consequences of his sin and established himself successfully in a new State, would be sure to harden his heart to a certain extent and make him more prone to commit the same sin over again, than he would have been if punishment for his sin had overtaken him at once. The winning of wealth would place new obstacles in his way, for is not Christ on record as saying: "How hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven"? Christ knew the powerful tendency which the possession of riches has to dwarf the better impulses of the soul and nourish all the selfish ones. The respect with which C's fellow men regarded him, not knowing of his act of miserable treachery towards B, would have a tendency to fill him with vanity and self-sufficiency and deprive his soul of any tendency to humility and repentance for his crime. All this handicap, if

I may so call it, in the race for eternal life, fell upon C and when he *did* overcome it all and *did* repent of his sin, it was harder for him by his subsequent self-denials and good works to elevate his spiritual nature than if he had fallen into such unfortunate circumstances immediately after deserting the girl that repentance for his sin would have come earlier in his career. It was harder for him, because the tendency to do wrong had been strengthened within him by every act of wrong which he had committed. Moreover, the obligations which his wealth and good fortune put him under, made it much more difficult for him to come up to the requirements of God, than would be the case had he met with only evil fortune, for is it not written: "Unto whom much is given, from him shall much be required"?

Therefore we see that God dealt out to this man and this woman equal opportunities to fit themselves for heaven and their own sins loaded them with equal handicaps. One im-

proved these opportunities, and overcame those handicaps; the other did not.

Now let us take the case of a chronic invalid or a physically deformed person, and contrast what God has done for him with what God has done for a person of splendid health and physique.

How easy it is, comparatively, for the man of splendid health to be cheerful and how hard for the sick man to be cheerful! How easy for the healthy man to be contented and how hard for the sick man! How easy for the healthy man to be generous to the poor (because he feels little dread for the future, being confident that he will be well able to earn again all that he gives away)! How hard for the sick man to be generous with his money to the poor, because he feels doubtful of his ability to earn more to replace that which he gives away! How comparatively easy for the healthy man to control his temper! How hard for the sick man, with shattered nerves, to control his temper!

How easy for the healthy man to shake off laziness! How hard for the sick man! How comparatively easy for the healthy man to avoid lying and deceit in his business (since he feels so well able to make his fight for a living openly) or to avoid the intemperate use of strong drink, etc., etc.! How much harder for the sick man to do all these things!

One's first inclination is to think: "How unjust God has been to a chronic invalid, or to a deformed person, compared with what God has been to a man with perfect health or form." But if the ailing man tries his best to remain patient and cheerful and resigned to the will of God, and *succeeds* in so doing, in spite of his sickness or deformity, this discipline will have such an elevating effect upon his spiritual nature as will make it much more fit for entry (by the grace of God) into heaven than if he never experienced those sufferings. Thus his sufferings are convenient stepping-stones to heaven, *if* he will avail himself of them.

Moreover, the chronic invalid is not subject in so great a degree, as is the strong man, to the temptation to yield to the sins of arrogance, cruelty, tyranny, lust, lechery, conceit, pride and vanity. The tendency to these sins forms the handicap of the healthy.

While on the subject of the strong and the weak, consider the case of a slave and his master. How can God be shown to act justly between these two men? Why, in this way. Each blow inflicted by master on slave increases the master's tendency to commit acts of cruelty and if after the master's death he goes to hell and finds that because the people in hell have no bodies, need no food, no money, nor can feel physical pain of any kind at all—he therefore can find no opportunity to *counteract* his acquired tendency to cruelty by committing any acts of *mercy*—then will he discover that each blow he laid on the back of that slave involved a heavy penalty which the master now must pay.

On the other hand each blow received by

the slave from his master afforded the slave an opportunity to practice the virtue of forgiveness. Each burden placed on the slave by the master, while it increased the master's tendency to practice selfishness also gave the slave another opportunity to practice patience and fortitude. If a slave improves these opportunities, he utilizes his sorry fate here to fit himself for heaven. And even if, after he should so long have practiced these virtues that he had set up in himself a strong tendency to forgive, to be patient, and to display fortitude, under all conditions, he should finally go to hell for other sins, he would find himself there relieved of the necessity to hunt blindly through the years for chances to practice these particular virtues we have enumerated, without the aid of a body.

Therefore while the master's temporary advantage here will prove his disadvantage hereafter, the slave's temporary disadvantage here may, if the slave will, prove his advantage hereafter.

Moreover, the *more* cruel and the *more* selfish were the acts of the master, the *greater* the degradation of the master's spiritual nature, and the *greater* was the *uplift* of the soul of the slave, *if* he endured them without hatred, resentment or impatience. Thus is the *exact impartiality* of God in His dealing between master and slave vindicated.

Again, consider the frequently heard suggestion that those suffering from incurable disease should mercifully be put to death. You have often seen that idea debated in the newspapers and heard it discussed in pulpits. Did you ever hear it refuted logically? I never did. The preachers generally declare we have no *right* to do this and they let it go at that. The editor generally calls the suggestion a reversion to the methods of savagery or to those of the early Greeks, and closes his argument with a sneer for the suggestor.

The *logical* reason for refusing to end the pangs of a hopeless invalid, is that every pang he feels is for him a *chance* to make his

soul more fit for heaven by practicing fortitude, patience, etc., and to *deprive* him of those chances would be *unjust*.

This of course is no argument for the alleged elevating influence on the soul, of self-inflicted pain.

We have already spoken of the good man who has wealth and of the good man who is poverty-stricken ; and also of the wicked man who is rich and lucky and of the wicked man who all his life remains poor and unlucky ; but in considering their cases we have dwelt only on the fact that the apparent disadvantages of the poverty-stricken are not really handicaps in the race for heaven. Now let us consider for a moment how the worldly luck of the rich may really be a severe handicap upon him.

You remember where Christ said : “ It is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

This piece of Oriental imagery about the

camel going through the eye of a needle was a familiar metaphor of that time and generation, being used to describe anything extremely difficult of accomplishment and Christ employed it because He knew His hearers would understand just what He meant by it. There was no danger that *they* would take it literally.

Now why are the chances for a rich man to get into heaven so remote? Because every dollar he owns presents to the rich man an inevitable and unescapable dilemma. Shall he use it in such a way as will involve self-denial for a good cause; or shall he use it for self-gratification, either in a good or bad cause? If he makes that dollar a vehicle for self-denial in a good cause, he thus elevates his own spiritual nature and makes his soul a little more fit for heaven. If he uses it for self-gratification, no matter whether he does good or ill with the dollar; gives it as a bribe to a public official or as a donation to a college; if he does it for self-gratification, he *misses* just that opportunity to improve his

spiritual nature which a corresponding self-denial would have produced; and the habit of self-gratification fastens itself a little more firmly upon him, every time he indulges in it; resulting in an ever-growing tendency to practice self-gratification again and again. And self-gratification is an un-Christlike attribute which, if long practiced, has a most insidious effect upon the soul to render it unfit for heaven. Christ knew how powerful is this effect and how difficult it is for the rich man, no matter how well-meaning he may be, to guard against it. He knew how easy it is for a rich man to deceive himself into thinking that he is uplifting his own spiritual nature by giving away to good causes the *superfluity* of his possessions, an act which involves no real self-denial; but which on the contrary often has the debasing effect of filling the soul with pride and vainglory, and blinding it to the importance of those simple, rugged virtues of honesty, truth-telling and mercy, and to that higher form of generosity which will not

deprive a fellow man of an equal opportunity to acquire money, which the rich man having graspingly acquired, may then give away to good causes.

But for all that, it *is* possible for a rich man to get to heaven; for you also remember, Arthur, that the same man whose conduct called out the remark of Christ's about the camel and the needle's eye, came to Christ saying: "Teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"

Christ said to him: "Keep the commandments," and He enumerated them.

The man replied: "All these have I observed. What lack I yet?"

Christ said: "If thou wouldst be *perfect*, go sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor . . . and come, follow Me."

Many people have interpreted this as a *command* from Christ to all His followers to give all they have to the poor. This seems to me to be an unreasonable interpretation. I believe Christ did not *command* in this case, but

only *advised* a complete surrender of all the man's possessions to the poor. Christ had already told the man that keeping all the commandments *would* fit him for eternal life; but the man demanded to be shown a way to attain a still higher degree of fitness and then Christ said (in effect):

“Oh, well, if you desire to be absolutely *perfect*, give all you own to the poor and come endure with Me the life of extreme self-abnegation which I am leading.”

This shows that real self-denial is the path by which the rich man may get to heaven, if coupled with the practice of the other virtues. But common sense and experience teach us that real self-denial can be practised by the rich man *without* giving his possessions away. There are *many* other methods; though they may be hard to find and harder to practise; but that is the reason why Christ did not *command* this man to give away his substance but only *advised* that course, if he, having made himself fit for eternal life by observing all the

commandments, still wished to attain a higher degree of fitness and make himself absolutely perfect.

We have seen how men may escape being everlastingly cut off from their heritage of eternal life, who yet fall short of perfection—and that is by attaining such a degree of spiritual uplift, that their tendency to practise virtue is on the whole stronger than their tendency to commit sin, though all tendency to commit sin may not be wholly eradicated ; and provided, in addition, that they have repented their sins and shortcomings and have asked forgiveness from God with true humility.

To many a rich man, who has come by his money honestly, God may say, in effect, at the close of life's journey : " Come up higher, friend. The burden of riches I laid on you was a heavy one ; though the opportunity it presented to you was correspondingly great. You proved not quite strong enough for the burden. Neither did you grasp the oppor-

tunity in all its fulness. Yet you practised so many virtues in your life on earth that your tendency to do the right does now overbalance, on the whole, your tendency to do evil; therefore you may now enter upon eternal life; since you have repented of your sins and shortcomings and obtained forgiveness; and you will start on your new career at exactly the same stage approaching perfection as that in which you were when your earthly life came to a close. Had you been strong enough to give all your wealth to the poor, you would now be entering on eternal life many degrees nearer perfection than you have yet attained, but that was your own affair. Every dollar I allowed you to possess presented to you an opportunity for self-denial. That you did not grasp those opportunities is your own loss. You did no *wrong* to the poor by neglecting to bestow your wealth on them, because those sorrows of the poor which you might thus have alleviated, were really opportunities for them to train themselves in

patience, forbearance, fortitude, perseverance and other rugged virtues which would have fitted them for heaven. By giving them your money you might have uplifted yourself; but it is not at all certain that the money would have uplifted them. Therefore you did not sin against them or against Me in retaining the money I allowed you to acquire, so much as you sinned against yourself. Nevertheless you found other means of practicing self-denial on earth and through the uplifting effect of this and the other virtues which you practised there, coupled with the fact that you have repented of all your sins and shortcomings and have sought forgiveness for them from Me, for the sake of Christ, your soul is now fit to enter upon a higher state of existence. You shall not be debarred from heaven because, being rich, you failed to attain perfection, any more than My poor will be debarred, because they, being poor, failed to attain perfection; but fell short under their burden of poverty and were unable to grasp

and utilize all of the many opportunities to uplift their spiritual natures which their poverty presented. Both rich and poor shall enter heaven if they have repented of and asked forgiveness for their sins and shortcomings and have by the continued practice of many virtues reached a state where their tendency to do the right is greater than their tendency to do wrong. These shall be entrusted with glorified entities which will constantly present to them many new opportunities to make up their spiritual deficiencies and to push on to absolute perfection."

Thus, Arthur, we have demonstrated that a good man's wealth is a severe handicap to him in the race for eternal life and a good man's poverty may really be a help to him, *if* he avails himself of it. Also that a bad man's wealth and luck are really millstones around his neck to drag him down to hell, and a bad man's misfortunes are all helps to him to bring him to God, *if* he will only so utilize them.

So, if we consider thoughtfully, all the varying conditions under which man plods onward to his goal, we can see that God deals out fairly and justly in *all* cases the chances for attaining *heaven*, which is apparently the only object of human existence which God regards as of any importance.

How does this argument impress you, Arthur? Have I made my meaning clear?

Your affectionate father,

J. G. R.

Letter No. XXIV

LONGEVITY AND ENVIRONMENT

Princeton University, May 10.

My dear Father :

Notwithstanding my admission of the truth of your argument that the body is the chief tool whereby a man may fit his soul to enter heaven, yet it may be urged, logically and reasonably, I think, that God does not act justly and impartially when He allows one man ninety years of life on earth in which to avail himself of the chances for moral uplifting which the body affords, and allows another individual only five, ten, fifteen or twenty years, as the case may be, in which to grasp those opportunities. How do you propose to clear up that charge of partiality?

Moreover, we all know and understand

what a tremendous influence environment has upon the soul of man. Then how can God be said to deal impartially, when He allows one soul to be born in the hovel of a poor, ignorant heathen who knows not God ; and allows another soul to be born in the home of enlightened, educated, prosperous, Christian parents ?

What logical argument can you advance to explain the apparent injustice of God towards the child born into heathendom ?

Your loving son,

ARTHUR.

Letter No. XXV

GOD IS IMPARTIAL

*Drexel Building, Wall Street,
New York, May 15.*

My dear Arthur:

Your implied argument that time and opportunity to use this earthly body as a tool to fit the soul for heaven, should be extended to each individual for an *equal* period and under *similar* circumstances, if God is to be relieved of the charge of partiality and injustice, is not sound. And I will tell you why.

Take for instance the soul of the infant child of Christian parents, before it has reached the age when it can distinguish between right and wrong. If that infant dies *before* that stage is reached, its soul goes to heaven. If it lives longer, however, its pure soul only begins to be contaminated (by the

growth of the tendency to sin) when it performs the *first* act of *conscious* wrong. If it always had refused to perform the first act of conscious wrong, it never would have become unfit for heaven.

Suppose then that the child dies after the commission of its first act of conscious wrong and goes to hell with a stain upon its soul, God had given that child a fair chance to attain heaven because it could have refused to commit that first act of conscious wrong which changed its spotless soul into a soul contaminated by sin.

Suppose, however, that the child does not die. Then when the temptation is presented to it to commit its *second* act of conscious wrong, it can choose the wrong and still further contaminate its soul (by increasing its tendency to sin) or it can withstand the temptation and choose the right, thus uplifting its soul (to a greater or less degree according to the virtue practised) from the fall of its first sin. By following out this analogy through-

out a whole life, it seems to me clear that whether man lives to be one hundred years old, or dies at the age of ninety, fifty, twenty or ten, he has had an equal chance with all others, to win heaven.

By this theory, also, the eternal and unvarying justice of God towards the heathen is apparent; but not on any other theory I ever heard advanced. According to the teachings of the church, the heathen idolator, who has never heard of the true God, cannot enter heaven; although it is no fault of his that he never heard of God. That fault, if it be a fault, must be attributed to God, if the teachings of the pulpit be followed to their logical conclusion, because He sent His son only to Judea to reveal the true religion, instead of sending heavenly messengers into all lands for that purpose. By this same reasoning God is to blame that the myriads of Jews who died before Christ came into the world, had no chance to hear about the plan of salvation.

But in reality God is not in any way to be blamed for the fate of those who never heard of the gospel of Christ, because no race of men, savage or civilized, has ever existed that did not, as a race, practise some habits which they themselves rated as virtues ; and did not, as a race, practise some other habits, which they themselves rated as vices.

It is true that certain habits which savages rate as virtues, more advanced peoples may rate as vices, but if the savage does not *believe* them to be vices, when he practises them, his spiritual nature is not so much deteriorated by practising them, as would the spiritual natures of more civilized peoples be deteriorated by indulging in the very *same* habits, while believing them to be vices.

It is not the act which degrades the soul ; it is the motive which leads to the act, that reacts upon the soul. It is the giving way to this motive, which results in a tendency to be acted on by the same motive again and again.

For instance, take the case of an innocent child who spies an apple hanging from the bough. The child does not sin if it plucks that apple from the bough and eats it, thinking that it has the *right* to do so ; or if he does not know that the apple is the property of another. But if he does know that the apple is the property of another and that he has no right to take it, and yet he does take it, the act which was innocent before, is now a theft. Why does it degrade the soul in one case to take that apple and not in the other? Because stealing the apple is selfishly disregarding the rights of the owner and selfishness is a vice, which if practised much, certainly makes the soul as un-Christlike as it can be.

Just so the heathen savage kills his foes, thinking this to be a manly practice and one entirely consonant with his rôle as protector of the weaker women and children. As such he glories in it. Battle uplifts his spirit and the preparing of himself to be a doughty warrior encourages in him fortitude, bravery,

patience, chastity, sobriety, abstention from over-indulgence in food or drink—just such virtues as the Christian hermit practises. In so far as the savage comes short in these practices he falls short of perfection as a warrior.

Even the savage appreciates the wickedness of killing his friends. He holds *that* to be a vice such as we hold murder to be. If you go out to-morrow and kill a citizen of your own country, or a citizen of any other country with which your own country is at peace, you commit the crime of manslaughter. But if you go out to-morrow and kill a citizen of any land with which your country is at war, that is not a crime, according to the way *we* look at things. But the taking of human life, whether it be of friend or foe, is probably viewed as much the same act by that God who commands us to love our enemies.

Again society, in its most advanced form, executes such of its domestic enemies as it has adjudged to be guilty of capital offenses.

God, who has commanded us not to kill, probably does not approve that practice ; yet we do not feel that the practice will debar us from heaven—and we are right, because the slight deterioration of the soul which befalls each member of society, when an enemy of society is put out of the way by an execution that we approve, can be more than offset by the elevating effect upon our souls of those virtues which most of us practise.

So with the savage. He takes the lives of his foes and yet may improve spiritually in spite of that practice. But if he murders his friends, he degrades his spiritual nature. A careful review of those virtues which even the most ignorant savages practise, will suffice to convince us that if the heathen faithfully practises all those virtues which he *knows* to be virtues, and abstains faithfully from all those vices which he *knows* to be vices, he has as good a chance as any other man to keep his soul unto the end of life in as pure and unspotted a condition *as when he was born*. And

it would be a gratuitous insult to God to suppose that the soul which He sends to inhabit the body of a new-born heathen babe is *not* as pure as the soul which He sends to inhabit the body of a new-born Christian babe. Therefore if the heathen, when he comes to die, has not fallen below his *natal state of purity*, no matter how many ups and downs, so to speak, his spiritual nature may have had in the interval, he will go to heaven.

If you raise the point that the environment of a soul born into a heathen body is much more conducive to spiritual deterioration than is the environment of a soul born into a Christian body, I retort that among Christians the number of people who are sinners, according to what Christians rate as sin, is proportionately quite as large as is the number of sinners among heathen, according to what the heathen rate as sin. Therefore the environment has the same effect as far as regards its influence upon the spiritual nature.

Take also the case of a child of degraded,

ignorant, uneducated, debased, and brutal parents who are nominally Christians—that is, citizens of a civilized nation; and contrast this child's environment with that of a child of educated, refined, God-fearing parents, and you will find that while the former has a more confused, a weaker, and a duller moral sense than the latter, yet he has no stronger inclination to do that which he *knows* to be wrong than the latter has. The child of refined, educated, Christian parents grows up with an acute moral sense. He has clear-cut ideas about the wickedness of a great many actions which the child of debased parents considers to be morally right or at least debatable; but the child of educated parents is just as prone to commit acts which he *knows* to be wrong, as is the child of debased parents to break the laws of his briefer moral code.

If you raise the natural query as to whether God will allow the soul of the ignorant heathen, the Christian of dull moral sense and the immature infant to enter upon the

same state of heavenly beatitude as the soul of the martyr, the philosopher, the sage, the priest, the prophet, and others who have attained an advanced spiritual attitude, while in the flesh ; I will not attempt to answer you more fully than to refer you to the many repetitions in the Bible of words and phrases which would seem to indicate pretty clearly that there will be a gradation of rewards in heaven. The fact that Christ told the thief upon the cross that he would go to Paradise at once, seems at variance with what we know about the lasting effects of a life of sin upon the soul, unless we surmise that heaven will not mean exactly the same thing for every one who gets there, at least at first. Each will probably start that new life in the exact state of spiritual advancement which he attained to on earth. To what stages of spiritual perfection the blessed will attain in time and with the aid of their "glorified" and spiritualized bodies or entities is a pleasant subject for conjecture.

This brings me to the end of my attempt to uphold the exact and never wavering justice of God.

Your affectionate father,

J. G. R.

Letter No. XXVI

PERPLEXITY REMOVED

Princeton University, May 20.

My dear Father :

The course of reasoning by which you have upheld the absolute justice of God—even under the most apparently inexplicable circumstances—is no less satisfactory to my mind than it is comforting to my heart.

You have yet to prove to me that suicide, under every and all circumstances, is wrong. I think I see already how you are going to do it. But do not let me anticipate you.

Your loving son,

ARTHUR.

Letter No. XXVII

SUICIDE ALWAYS A MISTAKE

*Drexel Building, Wall Street,
New York, May 25.*

My dear Arthur :

I am not at all surprised that you have partially anticipated the argument I am about to advance to prove that taking one's own life is wrong, under all and any circumstances ; for it shows that you thoroughly understand what I have already said about this earthly body being the chief tool whereby we may fit our souls for heaven.

It naturally follows that if this be true, then to throw that tool away from us, is deliberately to deprive our spiritual natures of their *best* chance for higher development.

Take an extreme case ; that of a woman about to fall into the hands of relentless sav-

ages. If that woman can suffer their tortures and yet forgive the savages, she will attain a much higher degree of spiritual uplifting, from the exercise of that forgiving spirit, than she would have attained by exercising her spirit of forgiveness upon petty annoyers. Therefore for her to kill herself before the savages capture her, would be to deprive herself of a great opportunity to elevate her spiritual nature.

If the martyrs who suffered death and torture for the sake of their religion had committed suicide before they were led out to the stake, they would have deprived themselves of the chance of wearing a "martyr's crown"; which is another way of expressing the prevalent idea that a martyr gets some reward in heaven brighter than falls to the lot of one who has been carried there "on flowery beds of ease," as the hymn says.

The fact that the stiffening effect which persecution nearly always has on man's religious belief, renders the zealot's chances of attaining

heaven many per cent. higher than are the chances of the man who, reclining on "flowery beds of ease" is likely to be enervated thereby, instead of braced, was perhaps overlooked by this hymn writer. But if he lived in America to-day and were an eye-witness of the rapid way in which the American Jew is abandoning his "orthodoxy" for sheer lack of persecution and because his Christian neighbors here don't care a particle whether he is an *orthodox* Jew or not—and if the same hymn writer could have realized how many more negroes, in comparison to their numbers, went to heaven from the *slave* pens than go now from the cabins of the *free* colored folk, he might have changed his metaphor completely around; realizing that sorrow, pain, trouble, anguish and torture cause the spirit of man to seek spiritual consolation much more often and eagerly than does the lack of those things.

If you retort that when a man starves rather than steal, or a woman starves rather than sell

her virtue, or a martyr burns rather than deny his God, each of these does in a way commit suicide, I answer that he does not. He is willing to live and is doing what he can to sustain life without sin, and the spiritual discipline involved in the sacrifice of life for principle is more elevating than any he would be likely to get should he save his life at the price of sin. Therefore as he would not gain any spiritual uplift by holding on to his *body*, he is justified in disregarding the fate of his body in such case.

This brings me to the end of my arguments, Arthur. Have I been able to dissuade you from adopting the profession of a preacher of the gospel? Let me hear your decision.

Your affectionate father,

J. G. R.

Letter No. XXVIII

MORE DETERMINED THAN EVER TO PREACH

Princeton University, May 26.

My dear Father :

Your arguments, convincing as they are, have only strengthened me in my purpose to enter the church and take up preaching as my lifework ; for I shall use in the pulpit the very same arguments to demonstrate the nature of a logical, common-sense hell, to uphold the unvarying justice of God and to prove the wrongfulness of suicide under all conditions—that you have fortified me with.

When I say “the very same arguments” I mean the spirit of your arguments rather than the strict letter of them, for I can see many blemishes in them, due to the haste in which you have written them down—blemishes which would subject you to censure from the captious

critic, but blemishes which could be removed by a more careful and guarded diction. In all cases I can see that your idea is sound and your arguments, in their spirit, irrefutable.

I feel sure that there exist one or two Christian churches liberal enough to allow one of their priests to advance such arguments, but if I should be turned out of the church for using them, I will still find some way to preach them; my sincere hope being that I may win into the fold a large number of those souls who now avoid the preacher, because he relies more on faith than on reason to sustain his doctrines.

I sincerely hope that this decision of mine will not estrange you from me, father.

What do you say?

Your loving son,

ARTHUR.

Letter No. XXIX

THE PARENTAL BLESSING

*Drexel Building, Wall Street,
New York, May 30.*

My dear Arthur :

Go ahead then, and be a preacher, if you must. Perhaps if they turn you out of your church for using the arguments of a mere business man to sustain the conclusions of the learned priesthood, I may be forced to build a church for you in New York and endow it myself. Stranger things have happened. I would have spent more than this will require, to set you up in business, if you had desired that kind of a career.

But if such *should* be the outcome, let me give you a few suggestions how best you may first attract by your sermons, and then hold,

the attention of the American business man who desires to believe in the Bible.

Do not insist that he shall regard anything within the Bible as too sacred to be questioned.

Make the common-sense meaning of Christ's words the basis for all theological doctrine and if any statement of any Biblical writer whosoever does not agree with the common-sense views of earnest Christians, then let that statement be always open to the attack of any fair-minded critic who desires to criticise it.

Remember when seeking for the real meaning of Christ's words, what I have already said to you about the doctrine of the inspiration of the gospel writers¹ and try to maintain this attitude towards those passages of Scripture which seem contradictory of the simple teachings of Christ: "These are yet obscure, because they have been faultily set down or faultily translated; therefore we will not enter

¹ Contained in Letter No. IV, beginning on page 17.

upon bitter and interminable arguments about their meaning, but we will withhold our judgment as to them, until Biblical students have arrived at some logical interpretation of them upon which all Christian men can agree, without violating reason or common sense."

Bear in mind also, Arthur, that all wisdom did not die with those fathers of the Church who conceived the doctrine of inspiration nor with those who grafted upon the church many other dogmas more or less logically built up on the utterances of Christ; nor yet with those who hundreds of years after Christ died, rejected some and selected other of the sacred writings to be grouped together in what we call the Bible. The scholarship of the world is riper to-day than it was in the times of the fathers and the piety is not less profound. Therefore if the doctrines of the fathers do not withstand the test of modern criticism, if they do not appear to the scholars of to-day, to be based logically and consistently upon the real teachings of Christ, then let them give

way to new dogma which appear to be more consistent and more logical.

When I say—let the older doctrines give way—I do not mean let them be totally banished and tabooed. Not at all. Let those who *can* believe in the old interpretations of the Scriptures adopted by the fathers, and in the old doctrines built upon the words of Christ by theologians of times long past, cling to them if they derive any comfort from them ; but, I say, let the Church also freely permit those of her children who *cannot* believe in the old doctrines and who do *not* think that all wisdom and power to interpret aright the words of Christ, died with the fathers ; permit *them* I say, to seek for more reasonable interpretations and more common-sense doctrines, without incurring the stigma of being heretics or atheists.

If you would assume *this* attitude, Arthur, you would still find in the Bible enough that is clear and logical to uphold fully the plan of salvation and you would get a loyal following

by such a large number of business men who are now classed as irreligious because they do not attend church, as would astonish you and would astonish a great many other people as well.

Your affectionate father,

J. G. R.

Enclosure Sent With Letter XV
(See page 56)

This document contains the utterances of Christ which refer to the Fate of the Wicked after Death; and the Course of Reasoning which Proves that it is Perfectly Permissible to Believe this Language to be Figurative and not meant to be Understood Literally.

Matthew 5 : 22.—“ Whosoever shall say ‘ thou fool ’ shall be in danger of the hell of fire.”

Here is no mention of a body at all. That the soul only is referred to as in danger, is just as fair an inference as that a body is meant. Hence the words cannot be construed as a positive, unequivocal assurance that the wicked will get another body after death.

Matthew 5 : 29, 30.—“ And if thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out and cast it from thee ; for it is profit-

able for thee that one of thy members should perish and not thy whole body be cast into hell. And if thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off and cast it from thee ; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish and not thy whole body go into hell."

This is clearly metaphorical language, for if we take it literally, then a man may stumble over his own hand and have his feet tripped up by his own eye. This lands us in an absurdity. Hence we must recognize the fact that the language used by Christ here is metaphorical and so the words "thy whole body be cast into hell" cannot be accepted as an unequivocal assurance that the wicked man will get a body after death.

Matthew 7 : 13.—"Enter ye in by the narrow gate : for wide is the gate and broad is the way that

leadeth to destruction and many are they that enter in thereby."

Here is no mention of a body at all. It is just as fair an inference therefore that the soul only is meant to be taking the broad way to destruction as it is to infer that the body is doing so. Those who find the former inference the more reasonable are certainly entitled to adopt it.

Matthew 7 : 22, 23.—“ Many will say to Me in that day ‘ Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by Thy name and by Thy name cast out demons ; and by Thy name do many mighty works ? ’ And then will I profess unto them ‘ I never knew you : depart from Me, ye that work iniquity. ’ ”

Here is no mention at all of a body and therefore it is an equally fair inference that the souls of the wicked only are commanded to depart from the Lord.

Matthew 8 : 12.—“ But the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness. There shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.”

This also is clearly figurative language, because hell is described by Christ nearly always as a place of fire. Now fire and darkness cannot exist simultaneously in the same place. The words : “ There shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth ” are not original with Christ, but are quoted from the popular terminology of the day describing woe, as habitually expressed by the Jew, and the words were used by Christ in order to reach the understanding of His hearers. Hence they cannot be construed as a positive assurance that the wicked man will get a body after death.

Matthew 10 : 15.—“ Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.”

Here is no mention of the bodies of certain wicked persons. We are merely told that their fate shall be worse than the fate of certain other sinners, whose punishment is not specified in this passage.

Matthew 10 : 28.—“ And be not afraid of them that kill the body but are not able to kill the soul ; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Here Christ speaks of the undoubted power of God to cast our bodies into hell if He should decide to do so, but neither here nor anywhere else does Christ tell us positively that God has decided on that course. Moreover that Christ did not lay any particular stress on the after fate of the body, in speaking these words as reported by St. Matthew, is proven by the fact that St. Luke, reporting the very same conversation, makes Christ say (Luke 12 : 4, 5) “ And I say unto you My friends, be not afraid of them that kill the

body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom ye shall fear. Fear Him who after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell. Yea, I say unto you, fear Him." Luke entirely omits here any mention of casting the body into hell. Hence for more than one reason Matthew 10 : 28 cannot be taken as a positive assurance that the wicked man will get a body after death.

Matthew 10 : 33.—“ But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father who is in heaven.”

Here is no mention of a body. Hence it is an equally fair inference that Christ meant the souls of the wicked would be denied by Him before the Father.

Matthew 10 : 39.—“ He that findeth his life, shall lose it and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it.”

Here is no mention of a body. That the "life" said to be lost refers to the soul only, is an equally fair inference.

Matthew 11 : 21, 22, 23, 24.—“ Woe unto thee Chorazin! Woe unto thee Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted unto heaven? Thou shalt go down unto Hades, for if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in thee, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee.”

Here is no mention of the bodies of the wicked. The people of Chorazin and Bethsaida are assured of a worse fate than those of Tyre and Sidon, but what that punishment is to be is not specified. Similarly the people of Capernaum are assured of a worse fate than those of Sodom, but just what punishment is reserved for the Sodomites is not here revealed. In addition the people of Capernaum are to go down into Hades ; but since their bodies are not mentioned it is an equally fair inference that their souls only are meant to go down into Hades.

Matthew 12 : 31, 32.—“ Therefore I say unto you, every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men ; but the blasphemy against the spirit shall not be forgiven. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him, but whosoever shall speak against the Holy

Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world nor in that which is to come."

Here is no mention at all of the body of the blasphemer against the spirit. Hence it is an equally fair inference that his soul only is meant as going always unforgiven.

Matthew 12 : 36.—“ And I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”

Here is no mention of the body. Hence it is an equally fair inference that the soul only is meant as being obliged to give an account for every idle word uttered.

Matthew 13 : 40, 41, 42.—“ As therefore the tares are gathered up and burned with fire so shall it be in the end of the world —The Son of Man shall send forth His angels and they shall gather out of His

kingdom all things that cause stumbling and them that do iniquity and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth."

Here Christ is explaining a parable and this is clearly figurative language, since the words translated "furnace of fire" are the words used by the Jews to specify the domestic fireplace. Christ does not here use either the words "Hades" or "Gehenna" which are generally translated into "Hell" in English (and we must never forget that "Hell" in English did not originally mean a place of fire, but took on that popular meaning gradually) and since the language attributed by Matthew here to Christ in explaining the parable which precedes it in the gospel, is plainly figurative, it cannot therefore be construed as a positive assurance that the wicked man gets a body after death.

Matthew 23 : 33.—“ Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell ? ”

Since the persons Christ was addressing here were not literally snakes or vipers, the language is clearly figurative. Moreover no mention is made of their bodies being sent to hell. Hence the curse may be reasonably construed, by those who prefer such a construction, as referring only to their souls. Certainly there is no positive assurance here that the wicked man will get a body after death.

Matthew 25 : 41–46.—“ Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand : ‘ Depart from Me ye cursed into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels. . . . And these shall go away into eternal punishment.’ ”

No mention is made here of the bodies of those condemned to eternal punishment.

Hence the words may be just as reasonably construed to refer only to their souls. There is certainly no positive assurance here that the wicked man gets a body after death.

Luke 13 : 28.—“ There shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth when ye shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and yourselves cast forth without.”

There is no specific mention here of the bodies of those cast forth without. Hence the words may be reasonably construed to refer to their souls only. There is certainly no positive assurance here that the wicked man will get a body after death.

Luke 16 : 23, 24, 25, 26.—“ And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said : ‘ Father Abraham have mercy on me and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in

water and cool my tongue,
for I am in anguish in this
flame.'

“ But Abraham said: ‘ Son,
remember that thou in thy
lifetime receivedst thy good
things and Lazarus in like
manner evil things; but
now here he is comforted
and thou in anguish. And
besides all this, between us
and you there is a great gulf
fixed, that they that would
pass from hence to you may
not be able and that none
may cross over from thence
to us.’ ”

This is so clearly figurative language that it would seem almost impossible for any one to take it as a literal description of hell. Any one who persists in taking this language as literal must believe that heaven is so close to hell that those in hell can see those in heaven and converse with them and at the same time he must believe that heaven and hell are separated by a gulf so wide that an angel

could not cross it. He must also believe that a sinner suffering the torture of the flames in hell would ask for one drop of water, though well knowing that before one drop of water could be carried to him through the flames of hell, it would not be cool but boiling hot, or wholly dissipated in steam. These absurdities prove that the language is figurative. Hence there can be derived from it no positive assurance that the wicked man will get a body after death.

This ends my list of the different references made by Christ to the after fate of the wicked. There are several repetitions in the four gospels of some of these expressions, but I need not set them down here ; for this is just how it goes, all along the line. Wherever Christ, or any of the New Testament writers, speaks of the body of the sinner being in hell, the language used may properly be assumed to be figurative. Therefore I must concede the truth of the argument that while we have

authority for believing the good will receive bodies after death, we have not any unequivocal and explicit statement from Christ that the wicked will receive bodies after death; and I also concede that under those circumstances it is just as reasonable and logical to suppose that the soul of the wicked man gets no body at all after death as it is to suppose that he gets one; and if we add to this the knowledge which we all have concerning the inevitable decomposition of this earthly body after the soul leaves it, I consider that it is more reasonable and logical to suppose that the wicked man gets no body at all after death, than it is to suppose that he gets some kind of a body, concerning which—its nature, material, powers, and whether it will be better or worse than our present bodies—we are told not one word.—A. R.

THE END

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